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M. E. Bradston

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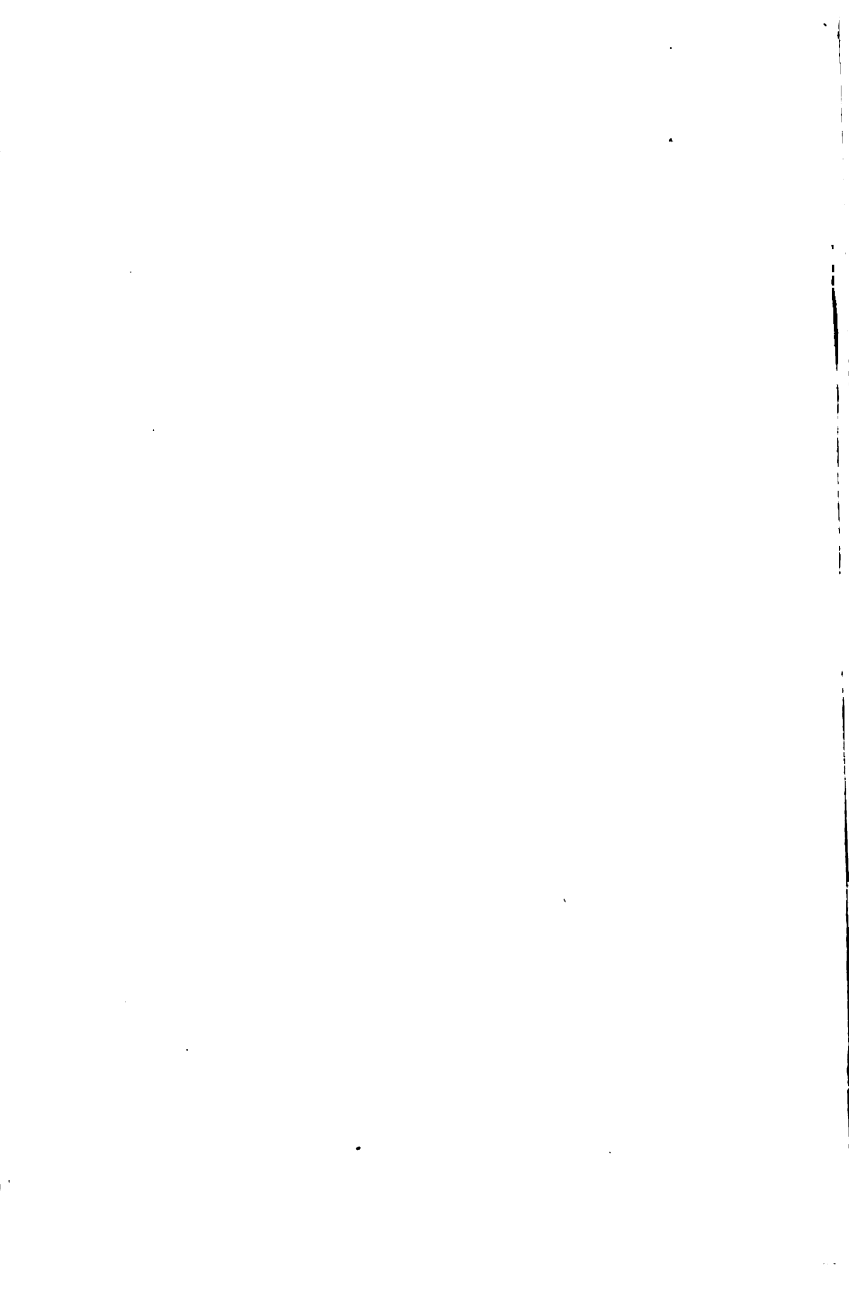
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# ROBERT AINSLEIGH

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# ROBERT AINSLEIGH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MY FIRST HOME.

My earliest recollections are of a scene which throughout an eventful life has been, and to the end of life will remain, in my esteem the brightest region of this various and beautiful world. From Indian forests, from the shores of mightier rivers, under the light of larger stars, my thoughts have flown back to the streams and woods of my early home, and taken shelter there, as young birds return to the nest they have been too eager to abandon.

I was born in London, in the year 1731, but of my birthplace or of those who watched my cradle I have no recollection. My first babyish steps trod the soft turf of a gentleman's park in Berkshire—a domain so large, that in my childish ideas the world beyond its boundaries must needs be very narrow. Deep in the heart of this sylvan scene there was a gamekeeper's cottage, and to the gamekeeper's honest wife I owed those maternal cares which transformed a sickly infant into a sturdy lad.

Until my tenth year this cottage was my only home; Jack Hawker, the gamekeeper, his wife, and their little girl Margery, my only friends. Nor did I sigh for other companionship or a more agreeable abode. The low plastered cottage, the slanting thatched roof, pointed gables, and small casement windows, curtained with roses and honeysuckle, appeared to me the perfection of a dwelling-place. It had been called the warreners' lodge in the old times, when the skins of rabbits and conies were employed for the costume of English knights and squires, and the rabbit-warren was a feature of great importance in a gentleman's estate. It still stood on the border of a great warren, the safe-keeping whereof was one of my foster-father's duties.

This tranquil home I loved with all my heart, and my little sister Margery—for by that tender name I had learned to call her—I regarded as the dearest of created beings. With her I

spent my days, wandering hand-in-hand among the fern and underwood, knowing the progress of time only by the different wild-flowers which the changing seasons gave us.

Nor did we lack companions and playfellows in our childish sports. The sylvan depths we inhabited were alive with wild creatures that had grown almost tame in this deep solitude. Mild-eyed fawns watched us gravely while we played; squirrels leaped and frisked before us, no more conscious than ourselves of life's realities; partridge and pheasant, blackbird and thrush, fluttered the young fern in the bright days of early summer; and in the shadow of a copse that was purple with hyacinths the rabbits swarmed thick as Virgil's famous bees.

This was my world from my first hours of infantine consciousness until my tenth birthday; and bitter was the stroke which ended this phase of my life. On the knees of the keeper's wife I had uttered my first prayer; in the brawny arms of the keeper I had been carried before I learned to walk. The first syllables which my lips had shaped were those that called these good creatures Mammy and Daddy. I was but just old enough to perceive the progress of events when little Margery's baby-face first beamed upon our family circle, and from that hour I had tenderly loved the fair-haired baby, who grew betimes into my sister and companion.

In those early years of my life I tasted perfect happiness; and not to the lips of many children is that cup offered. Over the fairest childhood there is generally some shadow—sickness or change of fortune, a cross nurse or a careless mother. But in the humble home where I was reared, there was no skeleton lurking in secret cupboard. The keeper and his wife were young, honest, and healthy. They loved each other fondly, and had affection to spare for the foster-child that came to them before their own. For these good creatures life was not to be all sunshine; for them, as for me, there were to be trial and tempest and gloom; but the halcyon days of their existence were these which I shared with them,—a period of calm and pure delight, which was destined to haunt me in many a scene of horror and death, in many an hour of heart-sickness and despondency.

My pleasures in these days were of the simplest. To trudge beside the keeper on his morning round; once, on a rare occasion of never-to-be-forgotten delight, to watch with him in the moonlit woods for midnight snarers of hare and pheasant; to ride to the market-town with mammy in a lumbering cart, which the good soul sometimes drove; to hunt for mushrooms in the dewy mornings; to pick blackberries in October, and to roast chestnuts with Margery among the ashes at Christmas,—these were the chief excitements of my childhood.

Neighbours we had none. The nearest village was seven

miles away from us. The nearest habitation was the great house in the centre of the park; a mansion of the Elizabethan era, encircled by a broad moat, and approached by a grim arched gateway that belonged to a much earlier period.

The fairy tales which I had heard at this time must needs have been few; yet I never beheld this gloomy gateway, flanked by its twin gothic towers, nor did I ever peer into the dark still water of the moat, without some vague sense of the supernatural, some instinctive feeling of awe, which was stronger even than my curiosity.

The dreary quiet of the place, the long rows of shuttered casements, the absence of sound or movement on the terraces and in the courts, the massive towers, and the iron-clamped gates, which seemed no more likely to be opened than the black doors of the mausoleum in the park,—were indeed calculated to inspire unwonted thoughts in the breast of childhood. When I was old enough to be curious, I questioned my good-humoured daddy, and he freely imparted all he knew about the mansion which filled me with such wonder.

He told me that house and park and woods, and the little church within the park-walls, where there was service on alternate Sundays, all belonged alike to his mistress, Lady Barbara Lestrangle, who lived in foreign parts, whither her husband, Sir Marcus Lestrangle, had been sent ambassador.

"Which be a kind o' king in its way," added the keeper, with the pride of a faithful servant, whose master's honours are in some sort his own.

"And does no one live at the great house now, daddy?" I asked.

"No one but old Anthony Grimshaw and his wife, and a couple of women servants. A rare starched gentleman is Tony Grimshaw, and has been house-steward to my lady and my lady's father these thirty years. They do say as Mrs. Grimshaw's a brimstone; but she have al-ways been kind to me and my wife, and 'twould come ill from me to say aught agen her. Madge was housemaid up at the great house afore I married her, in the old earl's time; and she's owned to me that Mother Grimshaw was a bit of a scold. She was Martha Peyton then, and own-maid to Lady Barbara, and they say as she must have frightened old Tony into marrying her. But she's been kind to us in the hard winters; and when Sissy was born, she sent us groats and wine and tea, and such-like fal-lals; so we'll let bygones be bygones, Robin."

"And has Lady Barbara been kind to thee, daddy?" I asked. We "thee'd" and "thou'd" each other in these parts; but I shall take no pains to reproduce the patois of the county, which I have indeed in some part forgotten, having heard and conversed

in many strange languages since I first learned my native tongue from honest Jack Hawker, my foster-father.) "Has she been kind to thee, daddy?" I reiterated.

"Ah, Robin, kind enough in the way of fine folks like her. She brought thee to my wife to nurse, and has paid me handsomely for thy bite and sup."

This was not the first time I had heard that I was but an alien in the home I loved so dearly.

"She brought me, daddy! Where did she bring me from?"

"From London, Rob; where thou wouldst have starved, poor orphan, but for her. The Lord knows where my lady found thee; but she was ever charitable and kind to the poor. Thou wert the sickliest infant ever these eyes looked upon, and thou must thank my wife Madge that thou art alive to-day."

"I wish thou wert my real father, daddy," I said. Whereon sturdy Jack Hawker snatched me up in his great arms and covered me with kisses.

"So do I, little one," he cried, with an oath; "but wishing won't make thee mine; and some day my lady will come and take thee away from daddy and mammy."

This set me blubbering, and the good fellow had hard work to comfort me. His forebodings were too quickly realized; for within a year of this time my pleasant childish life came to a sudden close, and I began the world.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### PASTORS AND MASTERS.

I HAD been gathering sticks in the woods with Margery one bright October afternoon, and came home loaded, with my little sister trotting merrily by my side, both of us happy in the consciousness of deserving mammy's praise for our labours. We came bounding into the cosy little kitchen; but finding no one there, threw down our burdens, and went in search of mammy. We paused, awe-struck, on the threshold of the parlour, that sacred Sabbath chamber, where portraits of King William and Queen Mary hung on each side of the chimney-piece, and where an earthenware pot of fresh flowers always adorned the somewhat cheerless hearth. In this room so rarely used as to be in a manner a chamber of mystery, we beheld mammy seated in solemn converse with a stranger; a thin, pale-faced woman, dressed in black, and of a severe aspect; a woman whose face had been ploughed and ravaged by that dire scourge of those days,

the small-pox, and at sight of whom little Margery uttered a faint shriek of terror, and immediately turned and fled. Not myself, who stood transfixed by the strange vision.

"Is that the boy?" demanded the stranger sternly.

My foster-mother faltered an affirmative.

"Come hither, boy," said the stranger; and I obeyed with fear and trembling.

Upon this she began to question me.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Robin," I mumbled.

"Robin what? Nothing but Robin, poor castaway!"

She shook her head in a dismal manner, and groaned aloud. I think it was the first groan I had ever heard, and the sound appalled me.

"Robin is but a vulgar name for Robert," she said. "Can you read, Robert?"

I stared on hearing myself addressed by this new name.

"Is the boy an idiot?" cried the grim stranger.

"My name is Robin," I answered; "and I know nowt o' reading."

This was true. In the circle in which I had lived, reading and writing were unknown accomplishments.

The stranger shook her head again, more dismally than before.

"It is time you were taken in hand, Master Robert," she said; and I hated her forthwith for this persistent alteration of my name. "Would you like to live in a big house, and learn to read and write?"

"I'd rather stay with daddy and mammy," I answered sidling up to my foster-mother, who rewarded me with a silent hug.

"And grow up a very heathen in the darkness of ignorance," said the stranger. "Happily for you, Master Robert, Providence does not permit us to choose our own paths, or few among us would be snatched from the burning. I have had a letter from my lady bidding me take you to live at the great house, where my good husband will undertake your education."

The whole of this speech might have been spoken in a foreign language for any comprehension I had of its meaning, except so far as it conveyed to me the one direful fact that I was to be separated from those I loved. I began to cry, and little Margery, who had crept back to the doorway, curious to observe the stranger, came running into the room, and flung her arms round my neck. Her affection conquered her terror of the grim stranger, and she looked defiance at the dame as she clung to me.

"Naughty 'ooman shan't take 'oo, Rob," she cried; but her



mother interposed, and laid a firm hand on the dear innocent's lips.

"We shall be very sorry to lose him, madam," she said gently; "he has been like our own child; and I wish my lady had given us longer notice before she took him away."

"Hoity toity!" cried the dame indignantly; "my lady thought she had to do with sensible people. You could not suppose you were to keep this boy all his life. He has to learn how to get an honest livelihood, that he mayn't be a burden on Lady Barbara to the end of the chapter, as some folks I would rather not mention were a burden upon my lady's father. He comes of a bad stock, Mistress Hawker; and running wild in the forest won't mend him."

On this the keeper's wife hugged me closer to her honest heart.

"There is not a better child in Berkshire," cried the tender soul, with some warmth.

Margery, perceiving, as by instinct, that I had been maligned, clung about me the closer; and thus bound together by grief and affection, and encircled by the mother's fond arms, we defied the intruder.

"I don't come of a bad stock, and I ain't a burden upon any one; and I don't want to live at the big house with the nasty black water round it; and I don't like you, because you're ugly; and I won't leave mammy and daddy."

"I wish you joy of your nurse-child, Margery Hawker," cried the stranger, getting up from her chair in a great passion, and stalking to the door. "His manners and his learning do you credit; and I'm sure my lady will be vastly pleased with you when she hears the good effects of your care."

My foster-mother pleaded pardon for my innocence and ignorance, in a great fright, for Mrs. Grimshaw held a sceptre of regal sway at Hauteville Hall, during the prolonged absence of Sir Marcus and my lady. Margery and I were sent from the room in disgrace, and retired to weep together in the kitchen, where I plighted my youthful troth to the sweet young damsel, and swore that none but she should be my wife.

"I'll never go to the big ugly house, Sissy," said I; "but we'll be married, and live in the woods with the squirrels, and have nuts and berries for our dinner."

"Yes; but some night we should die of hunger, and the robins would cover us with leaves; and mammy and daddy would be sorry," cried Madge, who had heard the story of the Children in the Wood.

After this there came a few more careless days, during which Margery and I gathered wood in the forest, and hunted for nuts in the hazel-copses, and forgot that there was such a creature as

black-robed Mrs. Grimshaw upon this world. Then came a bleak, bitter morning, when my foster-mother dressed me in my best clothes, and kissed and cried over me before she handed me to the executioner.

"The executioner was a small sickly-looking man, dressed in a suit of chocolate-coloured cloth, and wearing a carefully-powdered wig. This gentleman I was told was Mr. Grimshaw, and to him, as to his stately spouse, I was to pay all possible respect.

"You'll let him come to see us sometimes, won't you, sir?" asked the keeper's wife piteously. "He's been with us over nine years; and it's a sore trouble to lose him."

"So it be, wife, a sore trouble," growled the keeper.—"Thou'lt think on us sometimes, won't thee, Rob?"

"Ay, ay, he shall think of you, and come to see you too," replied the chocolate-coloured gentleman good-naturedly.

Even this little speech inclined me to prefer Mr. Grimshaw to his respectable consort.

"Thou'lt mind thy book, Robin, and do as thou art bid," urged my foster-mother; "and thy new friends will love thee and thou'lt come to see thy old friends sometimes."

"Every day, if they'll let me," I answered, sobbing.

After this there were many embraces and many tears, until Mr. Grimshaw grew impatient, and said we must be gone. So I tore myself away from those dear souls, who had made my childhood happy, and put my hand into that of the house-steward.

The day was bleak and wintry, and we trudged off at a good rate among the crisp fallen leaves. I looked back at the keeper's cottage. Ah, dear home, mine no longer! How many years were to pass before I should inhabit any other dwelling which I could dare call by the fond name of home! Mansion and palace, tent and dungeon, were to be my habitation in the shifting scenes of life; but long and far were to be my wanderings before I rested again beside so cheery a hearth, or among friends so dear.

The walk from the keeper's cottage to the Hall was a long one, and I had ample leisure in which to observe the countenance of my new guardian as I tramped by his side among the drift of withered leaves and the fallen fir-cones which I had gathered so merrily but yesterday with little Margery. It was not a hard or sour face at which I looked; and with the quick instinct of childhood I divined that this gentleman in the chocolate-coloured coat would be my friend. I pushed my hand a little farther into his, and drew closer to him as we walked on. For a long time we walked in silence, but by-and-by the old gentleman looked down at me with a curious glance.

"You are but a little chap to begin your schooling," he said, "but I see you are no fool, and I think you and I may get on well enough together."

After this he questioned me for some time about my past life and its simple pleasures, and conversed with me kindly until we came to our destination. We did not pass beneath the shadow of the great gothic archway; that ponderous gateway had not been opened since Lady Barbara Lestrangle's last residence at Hauteville. We crossed a narrow stone bridge of modern construction, which spanned the moat upon the inferior side of the Hall, and entered the house by a little door, the key whereof my companion took from his capacious pocket.

Within, I saw shadowy stone passages that seemed endless, innumerable doors of darkest oak. The silence and gloom of the place were awful to my childish mind. I clung closer to Mr. Grimshaw, and shuddered at the echoing noise of our footsteps on the smooth stone flags. We crossed a great hall where tattered rags of many-coloured silks hung from the vaulted roof, and where shone upon me, for the first time in my life, the splendour of an old stained-glass window.

The floor of this chamber was of alternate squares of black and white marble. The effigy of a mailed knight, bestriding a plumed war-steed of painted wood, shone in the rainbow light from the great window; and at the opposite end of the hall a staircase, with elaborately-carved balustrades in black oak, led to a gallery which made the circuit of the roof.

At this chamber I gazed with delight and wonder, and for the moment forgot my awe of the gloomy house. From the hall my companion led me into a long saloon, with ten windows, overlooking a small Italian flower-garden, within the moat: and from this we passed to another long room, where I beheld more books than I could have supposed were contained in all the world, seeing that one volume—a clumsy leather-bound "breeches" Bible—comprised the keeper's entire library. From wall to ceiling this long and lofty room was lined with volumes, for the most part in handsome, though somewhat sombre, bindings. Wings had been constructed, abutting into the room, for the accommodation of more books; and these abutments divided the spacious apartment into pleasant nooks and retiring-places, where I thought it must needs be very agreeable to sit on a bright summer day, when the flowers in the pleasure were all in bloom.

"See, Master Robert," said my new friend. "You open your eyes wide at the sight of so many books. What would you say if I told you that I had read them every one, or, at any rate, know the contents of every one—from the big brown folios down yonder to the smart little duodecimos on those

narrow shelves near the ceiling? I was my late lord's librarian as well as his house-steward, and all these books are still in my care, and are likely to be till I die: and then I know not how it will fare with them, for books are like children, and must be cared for by those that love them."

He hurried me from the library—where I would fain have stood gaping longer—by a small door almost hidden between two book-cases. This door led us away from the light and the sunshine into a dark and narrow passage, at the end of which Mr. Grimshaw opened another door, and pushed me into a square oak-panelled room, where I beheld the black-robed woman whom I had seen at the keeper's cottage.

She was sitting at a table working, with a great wicker-basket before her. She laid down her work as we entered, and gazed upon me with menacing eyes.

My heart sank as I encountered those searching glances.

"So, Master Robert, you have come at last. I began to think that you and my husband were lost in the woods."

I almost wished that this misfortune had befallen us, as I quailed beneath Mrs. Grimshaw's stern gaze. Surely the berries and the robins and the brief summer-day life of children abandoned in the forest would have been better than existence shared with Mrs. Grimshaw.

"Now, Master Robert," said that lady, "this is where you are to live until you go out into the world to earn your own bread, which will be as soon as you are old enough to turn your hand to an honest trade, or sit upon a junior-clerk's stool in a merchant's office. You are to live with me and my husband, and to learn what he teaches you, and to do as I bid you, or it will be the worse for you. And mark you, young gentleman, there is to be no gadding about the park, or sneaking down to John Hawker's cottage, to waste your time among vagabonds and idlers."

She spoke to me as if I had been fifteen years old instead of ten. But there was one part of her speech I understood well enough.

"My daddy is no vagabond," I cried indignantly; "and this gentleman said I should go and see him."

"Ay, ay, I promised as much as that," answered Mr. Grimshaw with an apologetic air. "Hawker and his wife seemed so sorry to lose the boy, and the boy cried at leaving them; and I could not well avoid promising——"

"You're a fool, Anthony Grimshaw," cried his wife angrily.

She rang a bell, which was promptly answered by a plump rosy-faced woman in a mob-cap and big white apron.

"This is the young gentleman, Betty," said Mrs. Grimshaw; "take him to his room, and see that he washes his face and hands before he comes back to dinner."

The maid led me off through the dark passage and up a narrow wooden staircase, into a small whitewashed chamber, neatly but poorly furnished. This room she told me was mine; and as it was superior to any chamber in Jack Hawker's cottage, I felt somewhat proud of the proprietorship.

"Has Mrs. Grim been unkind to you, boy?" asked Betty, as she scrubbed my face, exhibiting a merciless prodigality in the matter of soap.

"Mrs. Grim?"

"Pshaw! Grimshaw, child. We call her Mrs. Grim for short. The name fits her to a T; but Mrs. Brimstone would be still better; for brimstone she is, and brimstone she ever will be. Has she been scolding you?"

"She has not been very kind," I answered, whimpering.

"No, and it ain't in her nature; so don't expect it. She was turned sour close upon twelve years ago, when a fine gentleman that she'd have given her eyes for laughed and talked and made a fool of her with his pretty speeches and pretty looks, and then walked off and forgot all about her. *I know!* She took the small-pox after that, and lost her beauty, which was never much to my mind, and *that* didn't mend her temper. She hasn't had a civil word for anybody since then; and how old Grim could have been such a fool as to marry her, unless she frightened him into it, I can't think. But he did; and now she's turned methody, and is always going after preachings at the places round about, and leads us all the life of dogs."

Thus did Mrs. Betty give vent to her opinions while engaged with my toilet; and it is to be observed that from this time forth I became the habitual recipient of confidences ill adapted to my tender years. People who have but few companions with whom to converse will find relief in opening their minds to a little child; and whether it was Anthony Grimshaw who dilated on the history of the house he served, or Mrs. Betty who reviled her mistress, I listened with equal patience, and with no small interest; and being henceforth cut off for the most part from intercourse with children, and denied all childish sports, I acquired a gravity and a curious spirit not common to my age.

When Betty had scrubbed and brushed me into a becoming state of redness and stiffness, she conducted me back to the oak parlour, where I dined in state with my new guardians, attended on by Betty in a clean white apron.

Mrs. Grimshaw found a great deal to say about my boorish demeanour, and the ill-use I made of knife and fork, the former of which I was indeed accustomed to use with a freedom and a dexterity unknown in polished circles. The dinner was of the plainest, but served with much neatness; and after the cloth had been removed Mrs. Grimshaw kept the obsequious Betty



employed for a quarter of an hour in polishing the walnut-wood table on which we had dined.

Even after this operation Betty was not free to depart, for Mrs. Grimshaw bade her seat herself at a respectful distance, in order to hear the conclusion of a sermon, one-half of which she had been edified by upon the previous day.

"And I hope you feel some inward benefit from Mr. Whitefield's precious eloquence, Betty," said Mrs. Grimshaw. "I grieve to say there are some rocky hearts upon which the blessed seed falls in vain; some heathenish minds that prefer to pore over any dusty rubbish in a foreign language, rather than to hear the voice of the mighty Judge calling sinners to judgment."

Her looks were directed at her husband during the latter part of this speech, and he, by his answer, acknowledged that it was levelled at him.

"Why, truth to tell, Martha," he said, "there may be some that are not inclined to stand before Mr. Whitefield for judgment. If I am to be brought to believe that one section of mankind is destined for grace, and the rest doomed to perdition unspeakable, and that our good works and gentle deeds in this world shall avail us nothing with Him who promised His blessing in exchange for a cup of cold water given to His disciple, I will be taught by Calvin at first hand, and not Mr. Whitefield at second hand. We have the Genevese edition of John Calvin's works, in twelve folio volumes, in the library yonder; and I can read the 'Institutes' for myself if needs be. But it has been my custom to smoke my pipe on the terrace after dinner for the last five-and-thirty years of my life; and with your leave, wife, I shall continue to do so, till pipe and I go out together." By this I perceived that old Anthony Grimshaw was not completely under his wife's dominion.

"Will you come with me, Master Bob?" he asked; and I sprang up, eager to follow him.

Mrs. Grimshaw groaned aloud.

"The boy will stop, for the profit of his sinful soul," she said in a tone of command. "Sit down over against Betty, child."

I seated myself meekly, while Mr. Grimshaw lighted his pipe, and went out by a half-glass door that opened on the terrace—a noble promenade going all round the house, and bordered on this side by a bank close planted with evergreens sloping to the broad moat.

Then began the reading of Mr. Whitefield's sermon, which was performed in a hard, harsh voice by Mrs. Grimshaw. Of the sermon I know no more than that it was of appalling and threatening import, and that it seemed to my childish ears interminable. Betty yawned more than once; and on one occasion

I saw her on the point of sinking into a peaceful slumber; but she caught herself up with an effort, and stared at her mistress with unblinking eyes when that lady turned her gaze towards the handmaiden. When the discourse was at last ended, Betty declared herself beyond measure edified, but seemed, nevertheless, somewhat glad to withdraw.

Mr. Grimshaw had passed the window several times during the pious lecture, and appeared at the glass door, still smoking, a few minutes after it was over.

"May I go to the gentleman, ma'am?" I asked; and Mrs. Grimshaw having nodded assent, I ran out and put my hand into that of her husband, who received me with a kind smile.

"I like you so much," I said, "because you're kind, like daddy, though you don't speak like him."

From this time forth Anthony Grimshaw and I were fast friends; and the old man's gentle treatment enabled me to endure his wife's harsh usage with all due meekness. Her conduct never varied. Stern and sour in her bearing towards all her little world, her manner to me betrayed an aversion which she would fain have concealed. Hard, bitter, and implacable as my own evil fate, she cast her vengeful shadow across my boyhood; and if she could have prevented the sun from shining on me, or could have stunted my growth and wasted my flesh by the influence of her baleful gaze, I believe she would have exercised her evil power. It was not till later that I obtained the key to the mystery of her feelings with regard to me. She had, happily, little opportunity of doing me harm, for I was entrusted to her keeping by a mistress whom she feared, and whom self-interest compelled her to serve with submission and fidelity. She could, however, make my life more or less uncomfortable by small cruelties and petty slights, by cold looks and bitter words; and this privilege she exercised without stint. Had it not been for her husband's kindness I might have fared ill in that splendid mansion, where I was a humble and nameless dependent; but his goodness to me never wavered, nor did his protection ever fail me in the hour of need.

My first night in my lonely chamber was a very sad one. In my dreams I went back to the warrener's lodge and the dear souls I loved; but even in those dreams the bitter sense of separation clung to me, and I felt that I saw the familiar faces across an impassable gulf.

My studies began on the next day, in the parlour where Mrs. Grimshaw sat at work; and I felt her eyes upon me while I was being initiated into the mysteries of the alphabet by my friend Anthony. From this time my life became an unvarying routine. Early breakfast in the oak parlour, a walk with Mr. Grimshaw about the house or in the wide-flagged quadrangle,

where a Hercules and his club held guard over a vast marble oasis which had once been the glory of the place. Then back to the oak parlour for lessons, which lasted till the early dinner. Then Mrs. Grimshaw's lecture from the last published pamphlets of Whitefield or Wesley, or some minor lights of the new nonconforming church, and Betty's smothered yawns, and Anthony Grimshaw's figure passing to and fro before the windows, and my own weariness always in precisely the same measure. At six we drank tea; a solemn ceremony, in the gentility whereof Mrs. Grimshaw took much pride. At half-past eight she read prayers to her husband and myself, and to the three servants of the great melancholy house,—Betty, a buxom girl called Martha, and a rheumatic old woman, who lived in some stony obscurity in the kitchens, and rarely quitted her lair except for this evening ceremonial.

After prayers I was hustled off to my chamber by Betty, while my guardians supped together in grim state. I should often have gone to bed hungry if it had not been for Betty, who brought me a hunch of bread and a basin of milk, which I ate and drank seated on the edge of my bed with more enjoyment than I ever derived from the ceremonial meals in the oak parlour. On Sundays there were no lessons, but there was chapel—to my youthful mind a far greater trial. Mr. Grimshaw went on alternate Sundays to the little church in the wood, and to have gone thither with him would have been happiness unspeakable to me, for at this time-honoured tabernacle I should have met Jack Hawker and his wife, and dear little Margery. But here Mrs. Grimshaw had a convenient opportunity for exercising her tyranny, and avenging that unconscious sin which I had committed against her by coming into this bleak world. So she ordained that I should accompany herself and the two maids to the meeting-house at Warborough,—a stifling upper room, little better than a loft, in which the Rev. Simeon Noggers, an awakened tailor, held forth every Sunday to a select congregation of Wesleyans. In this airless chamber I underwent the tortures of a weekly suffocation while the Rev. Simeon pounded his deal reading-desk and exhorted his fellow-sinners, from the blackness of whose guilt he appeared to derive a dismal satisfaction. From that respectable teacher I learned that it was rather advantageous for the soul to be dyed of the darkest hue, in order that its renovation might be the more astounding. There I heard no exhortations to the weak and wavering; no friendly counsel for the small debtor, whose payments were but a little in arrear, and who needed only a steadfast endeavour to set his affairs in order and regain a solvent condition. The Reverend Simeon addressed his flock as if convinced that they were so many fraudulent bankrupts, conscious that they could

never pay a shilling in the pound, and rather to be congratulated than otherwise on their ignominious insolvency.

"Believe!" cried the awakened Noggers, "and prove your faith as I do, not as St. Paul did. Prove it by long prayers and reiterated invocations, in which the reverent address of the Christian to his Lord is superseded by a blasphemous familiarity; prove it by howlings and beatings of the breast, by upturned eyeballs, and solemn shakings of the head, and arrogant condemnation of all mankind except the elect of Warborough."

This was the gist of Mr. Nogger's teaching, which I heard during the ten most impressionable years of my life, and which did much to make me in early manhood a disciple of Bolingbroke and Hobbes. It fell to my lot in after years to hear both Wesley and Whitefield, and I then perceived the difference between a man of original mind and deep-rooted convictions, and the ignorant imitators who assume his functions without one of the gifts that have qualified their master for his office. I know that to that good man John Wesley there came much trouble and perplexity from the ill-advised officiousness and spasmodic industry of some among his followers. Doubtless he found other labourers better fitted to work with him in the vineyard; and it must never be forgotten that the uprising of the sect which bears his name has done much to arouse the sluggards of the Established Church, who had sore need of some revolution to awaken them from their guilty slumber.

For nearly ten years my life at Hauteville was all of the same pattern; my studies laborious, my pleasures of the rarest. Indeed, the only holiday I knew in these days was an occasional visit to Jack Hawker's cottage, and Mrs. Grimshaw took care that I should not often enjoy this happiness. The distance was long, and my task-mistress contrived to find reasons for refusing me the leisure required for such a visit. It was only when Anthony Grimshaw interfered in my behalf that I was allowed the privilege of an afternoon's holiday. Dearly, then, did I love the long walk through the park, the cosy supper by Jack Hawker's hearth, and the return in the dewy moonlight to the great enchanted castle, which, even after years of residence, still retained for me something of its awful charm.

Although to the last degree monotonous, my life during these years was not unhappy. In Anthony Grimshaw I had a true friend, and such a tutor as few prosperous young noblemen of my day could have boasted. From the hour in which he first introduced me to the hieroglyphics of the English alphabet to the proud day in which he smiled upon my successful rendering of a love-ditty by Rochester into Anacreontics in pure Greek, he made the steep of Parnassus easy, and the waters of Pieria sweet for me. It was a delight to him to have some one to

whom to impart his ripe store of history and legend, and he found me a willing and enraptured listener to that cherished lore. I knew every biography in Plutarch, and every adventure of Ulysses, before I could read the easiest page in my spelling-book; and I was lured on through the slough of despond which the juvenile student must pass, by the knowledge that the great brown-backed folios in the library contained innumerable stories delightful as those my master told me. The time came when very few of the brown-backed volumes contained any mystery for me, and when I could read alike easily in English, French, Italian, and Latin; and from that time forth my chief pleasure was found in the long library, where I used to spend my leisure hours curled up in one of the deep-recessed windows, with a folio on my knees.

The noble Elizabethan mansion was a source of perpetual pleasure to me. The great empty rooms reverberated with the echo of my footsteps as I roamed at large, with my tutor's official bunch of keys in my pocket. The very poetry of ghostliness pervaded those spacious untenanted chambers. All was swept and garnished; there was no trace of dust, no token of neglect; but the emptiness was none the less dismal. The house had the unmistakable air of a long-deserted habitation. All the brightness had faded from curtains and carpets, the gilding was tarnished, the paint was worn and dull; the stillness of rooms that had once been noisy with the bustle and grandeur of state-reception and familiar assembly was more oppressive than the solemn calm of a churchyard. But to me there was a subtle delight in that dead calm, that utter stillness. My imagination ran riot in those empty chambers. At will I peopled them with the shade of the mighty dead. The Virgin Queen revisited the house where she had been gorgeously entertained by the first Baron Hauteville; and I saw her in all her great littleness, the cynosure of statesmen and flatterers, philosophers and sycophants, lovers who never loved her, courtiers who dared not trust her, ambassadors who registered her every look and word for swift transmission to their masters, spies who watched in the Stuart interest, and hungered for the hour when this great queen should be dust. Swift passed that radiant vision of queenly grandeur and human weakness, and lo! the rush and terror of civil war. Buffets ransacked of their gold and silver store; plate melted, or sold to foreign Jews; trusty captains playing at hide-and-seek in chimneys and secret closets; Cromwell's grim soldiers battering at the gates. A sudden cry of horror through the land; halls hung with black; bells tolling slow and solemn in the wintry morning, and England kingless.

Again the scene changes, and it is the garish summer noontide of the Restoration.



"Room there for my Lord Rochester!" cried the lackeys by the great gilded doors of the white and gold banquet-hall; "way there, knaves, for his grace the Duke of Buckingham!" and athwart the slanting shaft of motes dancing in the sunshine came the shadows of Wilmot and Villiers, in their silken embroidered suits of French make, with long curling perukes and ribbon-befringed jerkins, stars and orders blazing on their breasts, and a languid light in their eyes. As I sat by the cold empty hearth, and mused, with dreamy gaze fixed on the opposite doorway, the room grew crowded with the notabilities of the Restoration; I could almost hear the fluttering fringes and sword-knots of those butterfly lordlings; but with a thought they vanished; and here was hook-nosed William, grave and silent as his mighty ancestor; and courteous St. John, and brilliant Harley, and anon all the wits and beaux, generals and statesmen, who embellished the reign of dull Queen Anne.

Not alone with the great whom I had read of did I people those desolate rooms. At my bidding other shadows grew into life. From the canvas on the walls of picture-gallery and saloon, the images of the dead descended to walk again in the rooms they had inhabited living. Hautevilles of the Elizabethan age, and Hautevilles of the Restoration; Hautevilles who fought in the low countries with Marlborough, and sat in the senate with Harley: about these, of whose histories I then knew so little, I dreamed my dreams. This dark cavalier had loved and won that fair-haired maiden with tender blue eyes and simple pastoral dress; that smooth-faced boy-soldier had wooed and been scorned by the haughty damsel with eagle glance and towering headgear.

For each of these pictured faces I wove my little romance, but was not the less eager to extort some details of their actual lives from my kindly tutor.

I often plied him with questions about the dead-and-gone masters of that deserted house; but with varying success. He was no gossip or scandal-monger; and, indeed, was so complete a student, that he thought more of a rare edition of an original classic, or a translation of the sixteenth century, than of all the changes and chances of the age in which he lived. An occasional *Postboy* kept him apprised of the conquests our arms achieved abroad, and the difficulty our ministers found in agreeing at home. But he thought more of the Philippics of Cicero than of a smart attack from the opposition, or a scathing reply from the polished chief of the famous Broad-bottom Administration; and was far better acquainted with the politics of the Pompeian party than with the objects and opinions of the minority at Westminster. Sometimes I was happy enough to find him in a communicative mood; and then I took care to improve my opportunity.

## CHAPTER III.

## I AM CURIOUS ABOUT THE PAST.

THE time came when anxiety to know the story of my own birth grew keener than my interest in the day-dreams with which I was wont to beguile my hours of solitude. It was on this subject that I questioned Anthony Grimshaw as we sat together in the library one bleak March evening, when the wind blew hoarsely in the great oaks and beeches across the moat, and the wood-fire burning on the low hearth made a cheery glow in the spacious room, gleaming now on the russet and crimson bindings of the books, now on the stout beams and carved oak bosses of the ceiling.

I was nineteen years of age, and older and graver than my years by reason of the monotony of my life and the gravity of my companions. It was not the first time I had questioned Anthony Grimshaw upon the subject of my own history.

"I think you know more than you choose to tell," I said.

"Nay, Robert, I know nothing. I may have my suspicions. But what good would it do for me to talk of such fancies? It might be but to mislead you. All I *know* is that Lady Barbara brought you here one winter's night in the first year of her marriage. She travelled in a postchaise with her maid—a Frenchwoman, whom she engaged on her marriage, my wife speaking no language but her own, and being therefore unadapted for residence abroad with an ambassador's lady,—leaving Sir Marcus in London, where he was busy with public matters, she said. You were a baby of less than a year old, and as sickly an infant as ever survived infancy. She sent for Martha, who had been married to me but a few months, and told her that she meant to adopt the child, having Sir Marcus's permission for so doing; which well she might, seeing that she was an heiress and a beauty, and might have married much higher if she had so chosen."

"And she gave your wife no account of my birth?" I asked.

"None that I ever heard. But Martha Grimshaw can keep a secret. I know she has her suspicions, which jump with mine; and that's why she has not been as kind to you as I should have wished. There was a gentleman once lived in this house whose fate it was to carry mischief and misfortune with him wherever he went."

"Who was that gentleman?"

"Roderick Ainsleigh, the only son of my late lord's only sister, Lady Susan Somerton, and Colonel Ainsleigh, a brave soldier

and a dissipated spendthrift, whom she married against the earl's wish, and with whom her life was most miserable. She died young, while the colonel was abroad with his regiment, leaving an only child but just nine years old. This was the boy Roderick. Lord Hauteville brought him here directly after the mother's death; and the next post from the low countries brought home news that the colonel had been killed at the head of his regiment. He had ever been as reckless of his life as of his fortune, and had been oftener under fire than any other man of his age and standing. Thus you see the boy was doubly an orphan."

"Poor child!"

"'Tis natural you should pity him, lad; but that double bereavement was the most fortunate event in Roderick Ainsleigh's life. The earl, my late master, one of the noblest and best of men, had loved his only sister with extreme tenderness and devotion. Her death and the death of her husband threw the boy entirely into his uncle's hands. My lord loved the child at once for the mother's sake; and the boy's handsome face and winning manners did the rest. Those soft pleasing manners disguised as proud a heart as ever beat in human breast; but I think my lord loved the boy all the more for his daring spirit. It was only in after years that he found how hard it is to govern a stubborn will, even when self-interest is at stake."

"Was the boy happy here?"

"He had reason to be; for if he had been the earl's son and heir he could not have fared better, or been treated with greater honour by all who lived in the house and all who came to it. I was his first schoolmaster, and taught him just as I have taught you. Often when you and I have been sitting side by side in yonder window—'twas on that very spot Roderick and I used to sit—I have fancied I was twenty years younger, and that 'twas Roderick Ainsleigh I was teaching. But he was neither so diligent nor so obedient a pupil as you, Robert. His mind was quick enough, and he would work hard enough sometimes, in his own impetuous way. But it was all by fits and starts—blow hot, blow cold. I had another pupil who very often shared Mr. Roderick's lessons, and that was Lady Barbara Somerton, my lord's only child; and it was not long before I discovered that the two young people loved each other with an affection that was something more than mere cousinship. Lord Hauteville liked to see them together, and was pleased to find his daughter desired to be wiser than most young women of her age. 'I would have thee as clever as Lady Mary Wortley, or Mde. de Sevigné, Bab,' he used to say. One day he broached the subject of the liking between his daughter and his nephew, and told me that nothing would please him better than to see his sister Susan's son master of Hauteville. 'I don't care to think of a stranger

cutting down the old beeches, or clearing the plantations that you and I planned when we were boys together, Tony,' he said. 'And, tie up the estate as I may upon my daughter, I can't tie up every old tree and every footpath in the wood. And I like to think the place will be the same for years to come, when my old bones are mouldering in the vault yonder, which it might if one of my own flesh and blood were master. A stranger has no feeling for old timber. Roderick ought to love every tree, for he has almost grown up in the park and woods.'"

"And was Mr. Roderick Ainsleigh very fond of his cousin?" I asked.

"He seemed to love her as dearly as she loved him; and I don't suppose it was all seeming. He went to Cambridge when he was nineteen, and I was proud to think that he was a better mathematician than most men of thirty, and would do wonders; but he got into a bad set at the University, and gave himself up to the wild pleasures of that place, which is within a ride of Newmarket, that infamous seminary of iniquity and ill-manners. Nothing but trouble ensued from Mr. Ainsleigh's residence at Cambridge. He incurred debts which would have been heavy had he been Lord Hauteville's sole heir; and my lord paid them, but not without protest, and some ill blood between the uncle and nephew. His visits here were few and brief, and it was evident to all of us that Lady Barbara resented the evil courses into which he had fallen. When he came he brought with him college-friends, wild young fellows, who attended all the fairs and races round about, lamed my lord's hacks and hunters, and turned the heads of half the servant-maids at Hauteville."

"He must have been a base, ungrateful fellow," I cried indignantly.

"Ungrateful he most assuredly was. Whether he was by nature base, or only reckless and extravagant under the influence of ill-advisers, I cannot tell. As a lad I loved him dearly, in spite of his wilfulness; but when I saw the unhappiness caused by his conduct as a young man, I was inclined to doubt whether he had ever been worthy of the affection we all lavished upon him. For four years things went on thus, with much trouble for the earl, of which he made no secret, and profound sorrow for Lady Barbara, who maintained a proud silence upon the subject of her grief, but whose despondency was too obvious to all who loved her,—except perhaps to the offender himself, whom she treated with a haughty distance which must have been to the last degree galling to that proud spirit. He for his part affected an indifference to her ill opinion, and even told me in confidence, that since his cousin had ceased to love him, he cared not a dot how badly she thought of him. I would fain have persuaded him that he was still beloved, but he laughed me to scorn. 'Wh

she is kinder to her lap-dog than to me,' he cried; "and when I have essayed to obtain her pardon for my manifold iniquities, she has received my apologies with such black looks as speedily silenced me.' One day the storm, long threatened, burst in sudden fury. There was a desperate quarrel between Lord Hauteville and his nephew, in which my lord reproached Mr. Ainsleigh with his ingratitude, and reminded him of his dependence. Roderick Ainsleigh was the last of men to brook such humiliation. He boldly asserted his independence, and in proof thereof declared that he would never again owe a favour to the kinsman who had so degraded him. 'I would rather take the king's shilling than eat the bread of dependence,' he said; 'and I thank your lordship for reminding me that I have no right to the bounties I have enjoyed at your hands. I blame my own dulness for my having so long remained unconscious of my abject position, and am glad to be awakened to the truth, though the waking has been somewhat rough. For the past I must remain your debtor, and I confess the debt is a heavy one; happily the future is my own, and I can promise that it shall cost you but little.'

"Upon this Mr. Ainsleigh flung himself out of the room with such an air of offended manhood, that my lord confessed he felt himself the aggressor. 'He will come back, Tony,' he said to me, when his nephew had left Hauteville, which he did directly after the interview. 'Sure, he knows I love him as a son, and am but too weakly disposed to excuse his errors, nor can I think that he has ceased to love my little Barbara, though the two do not seem such fast fast friends as they once were.'

"And did the young man come back?" I asked, deeply concerned.

"Never since that day has Roderick Ainsleigh crossed the threshold of this house. Whether he is living or dead none here can tell, though there is one who would, I doubt not, be glad to know the truth. He went straight from here to Cambridge, and it came to my lord's ears by-and-by that he had lost money to his Newmarket friends, over and above the debts my master had paid, and was in some sort a defaulter. If he had come back I know he would have been received with open arms; but my lord was too proud to invite his return. He had left but a year when his uncle died. The title died with him, and Lady Barbara, as sole heiress, became mistress of the estate. When her mourning was over she went to London to visit the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Davenant, relations of her mother; and while residing with them she married Sir Marcus Lestrangle, a widower of high family and small fortune, but of much political influence. She spent a few months here with her husband soon after their marriage, and then departed, to return no more except for that flying visit when you were brought hither."

**"But was nothing more ever heard of Mr. Ainsleigh?"**

"No further tidings of that misguided young man ever reached my ears, except one painful rumour, which connected the flight of a clergyman's daughter from her father's house near this place with the name of Roderick Ainsleigh. How justly I know not. Slander fattens upon the misdoings of the absent. The young man was not here to defend himself against these evil reports, and I doubt not they had some influence with his cousin, Lady Barbara."

"What was he like?" I asked; "I have seen no picture of him in the house."

"Ay, but his portrait was painted. It used to hang above this chimney-piece, but it was taken down and thrust away at my lord's desire when his nephew had been some six months absent without any sign of repentance. 'Take that ungrateful boy's face from my sight,' he said; 'it haunts me like a bad dream.' Would you like to see Roderick Ainsleigh's likeness?"

"Yes, that I should, mightily."

The old man crossed the room and opened a cupboard in the wainscot beneath the windows.

"Light a candle, Robert," he called to me as he groped on his knees before the open cupboard.

I took a candle from the chimney-piece, and lighted it by the blaze of the wood-fire.

"Bring your light here," he cried; and I went to him, and held the flickering candle before a frameless picture which he held upright upon a table near the window.

"'Tis a good twenty years since that has seen the light," he said, wiping the dust from the mildew-stained canvas.

It was the portrait of a man in the dawn of youth, a dark handsome face with a bright smile, but a look of indomitable pride in the eyes, which were black as a Spaniard's.

"Have you ever seen such a face as that, Robert?" asked my tutor.

"I can scarce tell," I answered thoughtfully; "but the features seem familiar to me."

"Seem familiar; ay, lad, and so they must. Think again, Bob. Where have you seen that face?"

"In the glass!" I cried, with a great start. "O, for God's sake, Anthony Grimshaw, tell me the truth, if you can!—was Roderick Ainsleigh, my father?"

"In good sooth, Robert, I cannot tell. I have told you all that I know. But you and my late master's nephew are like as—I'll not say two drops of water, for there is little waterishness in your dispositions—you are as like as two flames of fire."



don. Few men ever have life's highway made so smooth and easy for them as it was made for Roderick Ainsleigh; but, you see, he preferred to scramble through brake and brier, and lose himself in a forest of guilt and sorrow."

"You speak of him bitterly."

"I cannot well refrain from bitterness, though I loved the lad well, and took rare pride in his teaching. But he broke my old master's heart, and went near to break Lady Barbara's; for I doubt if all her fashion and grandeur at foreign courts have ever made her as happy as she was in the old days, when she and her cousin Roderick used to study the classics together, and stroll in the garden yonder on summer evenings."

"She must have been very beautiful in those days," I said, "if she was like her portrait in the picture-gallery."

"The portrait barely does justice to her features and complexion. But there was a sparkling brightness in her countenance which no painter could ever seize. It was such a changing face. A landscape in oils will give you the face of the countryside and the steady sunshine of a midsummer noon, but not the play and flicker of the light that comes and goes upon the meadows twenty times in a minute. She told her sorrow to no one when her cousin left Hauteville, but the changeful brightness of her beauty faded from that hour."

"Was the marriage with Sir Marcus Lestrangle a love-match?"

"I doubt it. The Somertons are not given to change; and I do not think Lady Barbara could so soon have forgotten her cousin. But she was alone in the world, and an heiress, and doubtless felt her unprotected position."

We talked some time longer of the house which my tutor had served so faithfully, and in the service whereof he hoped to end his days. The sun sloped westward behind a bank of foliage that looked black against that golden light. Patches of crimson lit up the westward side of the great brown trunks of rugged elm and oak, and flashed still brighter on the smooth silvery bark of the beeches. Belated crows sailed across the tender upper gray, making for their nests in the oldest elms. Thrush and blackbird sang their vesper hymn; and pensive from some mysterious thicket sounded the song of the nightingale. The distant water-pools reddened in the reddening sunlight, and the stillness and calm glory that belong to this one hour alone possessed our souls, as we stopped in silence to lean lazily upon the marble balustrade of the terrace and watch the sinking sun.

While we thus watched, a sound so unfrequent as to be startling roused each from his reverie.

It was the sound of carriage-wheels—the wheels of not one only, but several vehicles. Anthony Grimshaw and I regarded



## CHAPTER IV.

## I AM INTRODUCED TO MY BENEFACTRESS.

I MIGHT have brooded long on Anthony Grimshaw's strange revelation but for the rapid succession of events which followed within a short time of the conversation I have recorded.

After an enchanted sleep of nearly twenty years the castle in Hauteville woods suddenly awoke to life, and the monotonous calm of our existence was exchanged for all the stir and clamour which accompanies the sound of many voices, the tread of many feet, and the bustling industry of a full household.

It was upon a lovely evening in June that the spell which had so long held Hauteville Hall was suddenly broken. Not a word, not a whisper of rumour's busy tongue, had prepared my guardians or myself for the startling transformation. Anthony Grimshaw's indifference to the political events of his own time had kept him ignorant of ministerial changes at home, and of our diplomatic relations abroad, or he might have apprehended the possibility of Sir Marcus Lestrangle's recall from Madrid, where he had been our plenipotentiary for some years.

Mr. Grimshaw and I were walking on the terrace in the pleasant summer sunset, while my tutor's stern partner was occupied with her incessant needlework by one of the windows of the oak parlour. Her sharp gray eyes watched us as we paced to and fro, and I doubt not it vexed her to see us in such friendly communion, as it most assuredly vexed her to find me impervious to the slights she put upon me, and indifferent to her ill-will. Again on this evening we talked of Roderick Ainsleigh, of whom I had indeed often spoken since I had seen the portrait hidden in the library-closet.

"Surely there can be little doubt of his death," I said, "or some tidings of him must have reached you in all these years."

"It would seem likely, unless he has gone to push his fortunes abroad, as he may have done, under a feigned name, perhaps. He was ever a rank Jacobite, and got himself into no little trouble here and at Cambridge on that score. It was his nature, or his humour, to oppose those who loved him; and as the earl was a stanch Hanoverian, my young gentleman must needs toss off his wine to the king over the water. If he was living in forty-five, I would wager he was amongst the rebel crew that disturbed peaceful Englishmen in that year. He loved fighting and riot and intrigue, and would have refused to serve the best of rightful sovereigns if there was but a wrongful one to plot and fight for. I doubt there are always a number of these rebellious spirits, these innate revolutionaries, to create and foster rebel-

don. Few men ever have life's highway made so smooth and easy for them as it was made for Roderick Ainsleigh; but, you see, he preferred to scramble through brake and brier, and lose himself in a forest of guilt and sorrow."

"You speak of him bitterly."

"I cannot well refrain from bitterness, though I loved the lad well, and took rare pride in his teaching. But he broke my old master's heart, and went near to break Lady Barbara's; for I doubt if all her fashion and grandeur at foreign courts have ever made her as happy as she was in the old days, when she and her cousin Roderick used to study the classics together, and stroll in the garden yonder on summer evenings."

"She must have been very beautiful in those days," I said, "if she was like her portrait in the picture-gallery."

"The portrait barely does justice to her features and complexion. But there was a sparkling brightness in her countenance which no painter could ever seize. It was such a changing face. A landscape in oils will give you the face of the countryside and the steady sunshine of a midsummer noon, but not the play and flicker of the light that comes and goes upon the meadows twenty times in a minute. She told her sorrow to no one when her cousin left Hauteville, but the changeful brightness of her beauty faded from that hour."

"Was the marriage with Sir Marcus Lestrangle a love-match?"

"I doubt it. The Somertons are not given to change; and I do not think Lady Barbara could so soon have forgotten her cousin. But she was alone in the world, and an heiress, and doubtless felt her unprotected position."

We talked some time longer of the house which my tutor had served so faithfully, and in the service whereof he hoped to end his days. The sun sloped westward behind a bank of foliage that looked black against that golden light. Patches of crimson lit up the westward side of the great brown trunks of rugged elm and oak, and flashed still brighter on the smooth silvery bark of the beeches. Belated crows sailed across the tender upper gray, making for their nests in the oldest elms. Thrush and blackbird sang their vesper hymn; and pensive from some mysterious thicket sounded the song of the nightingale. The distant water-pools reddened in the reddening sunlight, and the stillness and calm glory that belong to this one hour alone possessed our souls, as we stopped in silence to lean lazily upon the marble balustrade of the terrace and watch the sinking sun.

While we thus watched, a sound so unfrequent as to be startling roused each from his reverie.

It was the sound of carriage-wheels—the wheels of not one only, but several vehicles. Anthony Grimshaw and I regarded

each other in silent amazement, and then the old man hurried to the end of the terrace, whence he could obtain a view of the broad gravelled drive leading to the great gates."

I followed closely on his heels, to the full as eager himself.

Three carriages were winding slowly up the hill; the foremost a handsome travelling-chariot with four horses and smartly dressed postboys; the two others clumsier vehicles, each drawn by two horses.

"It must be Sir Marcus, or my lady!" cried Anthony; "who else should come here with such a train? Run, boy! bid Martha have the doors opened, and the shutters in the library and saloon, and a fire lighted in the great hall, for it strikes deadly cold in summer-time. And tell Betty and Sue to stir themselves. The carriages will be at the gate in less than five minutes."

"I'll open the shutters with my own hands!" I cried, and ran off to the oak parlour, where I dashed open the half-glass door, and burst into the room, to the horror of Martha Grimshaw.

"What now, you unmannerly jackanapes?" she asked. I told her who was at hand. She started from her chair and stood before me, deadly pale and trembling; never had I seen her so affected.

"My lady!" she exclaimed. "It can't be."

"But it is, Mrs. Grimshaw. Who else should it be? There'll be wax-candles wanted for the saloon; 'twill be dark in half-an-hour. Shall I run and bid them open the doors?"

"Yes, yes," she answered in a strange, absent way; and I left her still standing rooted to the ground, with a scared, pale face.

By this I perceived that there was one person in the world of whom the steward's wife stood in awe.

The bell in the gothic archway sounded with a great clanging stroke as I ran to call the maids. Betty went flying to the gate, and Anthony Grimshaw appeared at the same moment with a ponderous bunch of keys, ready to perform his office of seneschal. Susan, the second maid, went with me to open the shutters of the great saloon. We lighted the wax-candles scattered here and there in crystal candelabra, and the feeble lights twinkled faintly in the dusky chamber. I went on to the library to open the shutters there, while Susan stayed behind to kindle the logs on the wide stone hearth. I heard the sound of several voices, and the echoing patter of high heels on the marble floor of the hall; and then from the half-open door of the library I saw Mr. Grimshaw usher the unexpected visitors into the saloon.

Two ladies and a gentleman followed him into the dimly-lighted room. The ladies were so hooded and muffled that I saw

but little of their faces. One was of a commanding figure, the other slender and graceful as the tall white lilies in the Italian garden. The elder lady sank into an arm-chair, with a sigh of fatigue, and flung off her black-silk hood and cloak. Yes, this was my Lady Barbara, as beautiful as the portrait with which I was so familiar, but of a more developed and regal beauty. Her dress was of a dark crimson brocade, her shoulders and arms veiled in a cloud of black lace. She wore powder, which became her admirably; and her full round throat, of marble whiteness, was encircled by a broad band of black velvet, clasped with a gem that seemed to emit a brighter flame than any of the tapers twinkling against the mirrors on the walls. Never, except in pictures, had I seen a woman of rank, and for the moment the vision somewhat dazzled my unaccustomed eyes.

The younger lady also removed her hood, and I beheld a pale, fair face, framed by loose unpowdered auburn hair. Such pale and fragile loveliness showed poorly beside the blaze of Lady Barbara's beauty; but I felt rather than saw that this young lady was beautiful.

The gentleman yawned aloud, and leaned with a listless air against the carved-oak chimney, amusing himself by kicking the smouldering logs with the toe of his boot.

"Damp wood, and a room that feels like a vault; and I conclude, very small probability of supper. You should really have written to apprise your people of your coming, Lady Barbara."

The speaker was a young man, tall, slim, good-looking, and dressed in a suit of cut velvet, with point-lace ruffles and cravat. He wore high riding-boots, and a court-sword dangled at his side. My only acquaintance with this species was derived from Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, and this gentleman reminded me of Sir Plume.

"It was my humour to come unannounced," replied my lady somewhat haughtily; and then she addressed her steward, in a much sweeter tone. "You will not let us go to bed supperless, will you, Anthony?"

"Indeed, no, my lady; if a pair of chickens and a dish of broiled ham, with strawberries from the garden, and a bowl of cream from Betty's dairy, will content your ladyship—and this gentleman."

"Nothing could be better, my good Anthony. But you must not let our sudden arrival disturb you. We have brought two coachloads of London servants, and all they want is to be shown the way to the kitchen, and the geography of larders, pantries, and still-rooms, which, I remember, is rather intricate at Hauteville. Sir Marcus will not be able to join us for a week. This lady is Miss Hemsley, my husband's niece; and this gentleman is my stepson, Mr. Everard Lestrangle. But where is Martha?"

I shall be glad to see her, and to settle what rooms we had best occupy."

Mrs. Grimshaw entered the saloon as her mistress spoke. She had changed her black-stuff gown for one of stiff rustling silk, and wore a frilled-muslin handkerchief, fastened with a diamond brooch. Never before had I seen her so attired. She saluted her mistress with a profound curtsy, and bade her welcome to Hauteville.

My lady acknowledged her compliments somewhat coldly, as I thought.

"How is your charge, Martha?" she asked. "Your letters have been of the briefest, and gave me little news of him."

I knew it was of myself she spoke, and an irresistible impulse impelled me to approach her. There was a kindness in her tone which invited my confidence. "*Here is a friend,*" I thought.

I had just lighted a pair of wax-candles, in heavy bronze candlesticks, which stood on a writing-table by the hearth. With these in my hands I entered the saloon, and carried them to the table by which Lady Barbara had seated herself.

"O God, a ghost!" she cried, half-rising from her chair, and looking at me with wide-opened eyes; and then, sinking back into her chair, she murmured faintly, "You never told me he was so like. You should have prepared me for this, Martha."

"My father would scarcely feel flattered by your emotion, madam," said Mr. Lestranger, with a sneer.

"I have no secrets from your father, sir," my lady answered proudly; and the gentleman's sarcastic smile vanished as she looked at him.

"It is possible my jealousy is keener than my father's," he said, not without a certain significance of tone.

Lady Barbara turned from him with an air of supreme indifference, and addressed herself to me.

"Your face reminds me of the dead, sir; but you are not less welcome to me. What is your name?"

"Robert, madam."

"What else?"

"I have no other name, madam."

"And you have never taken the pains to seek one?"

"No, madam. When first I came to this house, Mrs. Grimshaw told me I was nameless. I have asked no further questions."

I might have added that I had been reminded not once but twenty times a week of my abandoned condition, and that such epithets as foundling, beggar, castaway, and even coarser terms of reproach, were but too familiar to me.

"Indeed!" cried my lady, with a glance at Mrs. Martha, which boded ill for that personage. "Mrs. Grimshaw volunteered

information upon a subject of which she knew little. *She is fond of giving information.*" This was said with a most bitter emphasis; and then, turning to me with a sweet protecting smile, Lady Barbara continued: "Your name is Robert Ainsleigh, and you are my kinsman. I fear you have had a somewhat desolate boyhood in this deserted house; but I placed you in the care of my old friend Anthony, because I knew you would find in him a kind friend and an accomplished tutor."

"And I have found both, madam," I answered promptly; "as good a friend as a fatherless lad ever knew, as patient and learned a master as ever earned the affection of his pupil."

"I am glad to hear you speak so heartily," replied my lady. "While I remain at Hauteville you will live with me and my family, and it will be for yourself to determine your future career."

She extended her hand, and I dropped on my knee, as I raised the fair hand to my lips.

The gentleman lounging against the chimney-piece gave a little sarcastic laugh.

"Egad, Lady Barbara, your country cousin is a courtier by instinct. I warrant me he will soon eat a toad with as good a grace as if he had hunted tufts at the University and graduated at Leicester House."

I wondered at so much animosity from a stranger, but it has been my ill-fortune in life to find more than one bitter enemy ready-made, like this, and to receive direst injuries from those I have never consciously offended.

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## CHAPTER V.

### I RISE IN THE WORLD.

If in my childhood I had regarded Hauteville Hall as a kind of enchanted castle of fairy legend, I had still better ground for the pleasant fancy after the coming of Lady Barbara Lestrangle, for my life underwent a transformation as sudden and complete as that which befalls the prince who, after pining for years in the guise of some repulsive beast, is once more restored to his own image, and finds himself a prosperous and comely gentleman. As Robert the Nameless, dependent on an absent lady's bounty, I had endured extreme humiliation; as Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, my lady's cousin and favourite, I was courted and flattered in a manner which at once confused and amazed me. My late tyrant, Martha Grimshaw, was of all people most obsequious; and I perceived that, in her fear of my lady's

anger, she would have stooped to any degradation in order to conciliate me. I received her advances with supreme coldness, and took occasion to inform her that she had nothing to fear from my malice or to hope from my regard.

"It was my misfortune to live with you for ten years," I said; "and it is difficult for any man to blot out the memory of so long a period; but, so far as it is possible, I will forget the slights you have inflicted upon me, and the petty spite which has influenced your conduct towards me from the day of your first meeting. Your husband's kindness to me has, however, been as unvarying as your own harshness, and you may be secure that my respect for him will prevent me from injuring you."

Mrs. Grimshaw's dull gray eye shone with a pale fire as she answered me.

"I am much beholden to you, sir," she said, in slow measured tones, "that you should condescend so far as to refrain from injuring me in the opinion of my mistress, whose last caprice inclines her to patronize you. You are as yet a stranger to the whims and humours of a fine lady, and I scarce wonder that your sudden elevation has turned your head. It is a new thing for a penniless dependent to be raised from the society of such low persons as my husband and myself to the company of an earl's daughter and an ambassador's son; but I would have you remember that it is easier to come downstairs than to go upwards, and that you may some day find yourself turned out of doors, as Mr. Roderick Ainsleigh was before you."

"My father was not turned out of doors!" I cried angrily.

"Your father! Who gave you an earl's nephew for your father? Pray where is your certificate of birth, or your mother's marriage lines? You are quick to boast of your father; and I doubt not, if he has bequeathed you his face you have inherited his wicked heart also."

"Why do you malign him?" I exclaimed; "he never can have injured you."

"Of course not," cried Mrs. Grimshaw bitterly; "what should there be in common between low-born dirt like me and such a gentleman as that? Why, nothing. But I tell you this, Robert Ainsleigh—since it pleases you to borrow a bad man's name—your father brought sorrow wherever he came, and there were few who looked on his face who did not live to rue having seen it."

The inconsequence of this speech mystified me, but I did not question Mrs. Grimshaw, who departed malevolent as ever—more malevolent, if possible, since I had repudiated her civilities.

In my new phase of existence, however, I saw but little of

the severe Martha. For me there was to be no more of Mr. Whitefield's Calvinistic discourse, no more tracts of alarming import, no more prim one-o'clock dinners in the oak parlour, no more silent comfortless meals beneath the gaze of my persecutor.

From the little whitewashed chamber at the top of a narrow wooden staircase, where I had slept ever since my first coming to Hauteville Hall, I found myself transferred to an airy and spacious tapestried apartment over the library, with an oriel window looking on the Italian garden. A tailor from Warborough came to take my orders for several suits of the prevailing fashion, and Lady Barbara herself assisted me to select patterns and colours, while Mr. Snip waited respectfully with his pattern-book across his arm. My mornings were still given to the classics with my kind master, Anthony Grimshaw; but after we had read an act of a Greek tragedy, or the funeral oration of Pericles, or a dozen pages of Tacitus, my tutor and I parted company; and unless I made it my business to join him as he took his after-dinner pipe on the terrace, we saw no more of each other till the next day. In short, I was now a gentleman, and my sphere was the drawing-room, where I sat by Lady Barbara's tambour-frame, or hung over Miss Hemsley's harpsichord, as if I had been to the manner born. How shall I describe the kindness of my kinswoman, who, having chosen to assume the care of my fortunes, was determined to fulfil her duty to the uttermost?

"It seems cruel to have left you so long to languish in this lonely place," she said, during our first *tête-à-tête*; "but I could not get Sir Marcus away from Madrid, and it would have seemed ungracious to leave him; so I waited, almost hoping for some breach between England and Spain, in order to bring about my husband's recall. And then the years slipped by so quickly. I knew Anthony would be kind to you, and I did not think Martha would be unkind, which I fear she was, though you refuse to admit as much. In short, dear cousin, believe me, I was not so cruel as I must needs have seemed."

"You never seemed anything but my bountiful benefactress and friend," I replied; "I knew that I owed everything to you, and must have perished but for your charity."

"No, Robert, I will not have that word."

"Nay, dear madam, there is no other fits your goodness."

And again my lady gave me her hand, which I once more raised to my lips in grateful homage.

I was now installed as one of the family, with as little sense of dependence as it is possible for a dependent to feel.

I was agreeably surprised by the conduct of Mr. Lestranger, who treated me with a cordiality which I was far from expecting



to receive from him, after his supercilious tone on the night of our first meeting. He was something of a fop and fine gentleman; but pronounced himself, nevertheless, delighted with the park and woods, the noble trout-stream which intersected the estate, and in which I was able to show him the deeps and shallows, the shadowy inlets where his fly might do most execution, and the reedy margins where he might be sure of a gigantic jack. He suffered me to do the honours of Hauteville, and entertained me agreeably with his own adventures at home and abroad, which he was never tired of relating. I discovered by and by that this gentleman, who was yet on the sunny side of his twenty-seventh birthday, was past-master of the knowledge of evil, and had long outlived his abhorrence of the vices and his respect for the virtues of his fellow-men.

I did not, however, make this discovery immediately, being too much unused to the society of fine gentlemen, and to the world in general, to be a skilled observer. Little by little these things revealed themselves to me; and I had been some months in Mr. Everard's company before I learned rightly to estimate his civilities or to appreciate his value.

His father arrived at the Hall within a week of Lady Barbara's advent; and I was presented to that important personage with all due ceremony. He received me with a somewhat cold courtesy, and I was quick to discover that my presence gave him little pleasure. Toleration was, evidently, all I must expect from him; but the kindness of my benefactress would have compensated me for worse treatment from Sir Marcus; and while I took care not to intrude myself upon that gentleman, I rigidly refrained from any attempt to conciliate his good graces. My grateful affection for my protectress might be misinterpreted; for that I cared little; but I was determined to eat no toads for Sir Marcus Lestrangle.

Happily for me, however, the diplomatist was by no means a domestic character. He spent the greater part of his day in his study, and of an evening played piquet with my lady in her dressing-room, while Everard Lestrangle, Miss Hemsley, and myself amused ourselves in the saloon, or strolled on the terrace and in the garden. He paid numerous visits to the seats of the neighbouring nobility and gentry, travelling sometimes as many as thirty miles to a dinner, and altogether troubled us but little with his company. He was an elegant and accomplished gentleman, of about fifty years of age, in person much resembling his only son, but of more perfect although colder manners. Between himself and Everard there obtained a stately politeness which did not betoken a very warm affection. It was rather the manner of skilled fencers on guard than of a father and son. My lady told me in confidence that Sir Marcus desired to see his

son united in marriage with Dorothea, or Dora, Hemsley, not only the most amiable of women, but a considerable fortune.

"Whether this will ever come to pass I know not," she said in conclusion; "but I am bound to assist my husband's projects. Dora is a sweet girl, and my only fear is that Everard should prove unworthy of her."

"They are not betrothed to each other, are they, madam?" I asked, perhaps more anxiously than the circumstances warranted.

"No, there has been no formal betrothal; but Dora can hardly be ignorant of her uncle's wish. She was left an orphan five years ago, and since that time has lived with me. I do not know what I should do without her. I have no children of my own, you see, Robert. There is a little grave in Spain that I cannot think of at this day without a heartache, though it is fifteen years old; but no child of mine lived to call me mother. Yes, Dora is very dear to me," she added, abruptly changing the subject.

This confidence occurred within a week of Lady Barbara's arrival. In after-days, when I had suffered a bitter pain and languished under the burden of a secret sorrow, I could not help thinking that my benefactress had told me these things thus early in order that no peril might arise from my daily companionship with Dora Hemsley. But there is one disease against which antidotes and preventives are administered in vain, and from this cruel fever I was doomed to suffer.

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## CHAPTER V

### I FALL IN LOVE.

DURING one of our earliest rambles in Hauteville woods, I introduced Mr. Everard Lestrangle to the warrener's lodge, where the travelled gentleman soon contrived to make himself agreeable to honest Dame Hawker and my sweet Margery, who had blossomed into rare beauty in the calm solitude of her woodland home. She was but just seventeen years of age, slim and graceful as the young fawns which had frisked around her and eaten from her rosy palm. Her beauty was that of a true wood-nymph, and had nothing in common with Dorothea Hemsley's fair loveliness. Margery's skin was a pale olive, charmingly relieved by the deep crimson of cheeks and lips. Her eyes were hazel-brown, large, bright, and sparkling with the innocent vivacity of a pure and fearless soul: her hair also a rich nut-brown, tinged with gold—waving, rippling hair, which defied her

girlish vanity when she would fain have pinned and pinioned it into some semblance of the two or three fashionable heads she saw at church.

I had happened to tell my new acquaintance that Jack Hawker was an excellent angler, and his daughter skilled in the fabrication of a famous trout-fly, whereupon Mr. Lestrangle expressed himself eager to see my foster-father.

"A very bower of Arcadia!" he cried, as we approached the dear old white-walled cottage. "And so this is where you were reared? I declare, Ainsleigh, you were a lucky dog to have a scoundrel for your father."

"Scoundrel or no scoundrel, as he was my father I would rather you called him no hard names," I answered somewhat sullenly; for I had no idea of suffering this gentleman to throw dirt at Roderick Ainsleigh's grave.

We found the cottage tenantless. Jack Hawker was doubtless absent on his rounds, and it was market-day at Warborough, whither my foster-mother went every week to make her purchases, and dispose of small produce in the way of honey and eggs, and vegetables from the fertile garden. The doors being all opened, in the sultry midsummer weather, we went into the kitchen, whence we beheld as fair a vision as painter ever perpetuated by the work of his brush.

At the end of a narrow garden-path, overarched by the straggling boughs of elder, quince, and hazel, stood Margery, in the centre of a little grass-plot, with the sunshine on her loose uncovered hair and light chintz petticoat. She was feeding her poultry, which swarmed eagerly round her, and did sturdy battle amongst themselves for the barley which her pretty hands shook down on them from a well-filled sieve. So busily was she occupied as not to be aware of our approach till we stood within a few yards of her; and then it was a pretty sight to see her bashfulness and sweet blushing confusion when she glanced suddenly upward and perceived us watching her.

She came and shook me by the hand, and dropped a low curtsy to my companion. Her manner towards myself had much changed during the last year. She was no longer the familiar foster-sister who had been wont to hold up her rosy lips to receive the fraternal kiss, but a bashful maiden, whose eyelids drooped when we met, and from whom I had sometimes trouble to extort more than murmured monosyllabic replies to my talk, yet who would by fits and starts be vivacious and animated, playful and capricious, as some forest elf.

This I took to be the natural shyness of maidenhood, that tender early dawn of life in which a woman is wholly surprised and half-ashamed to find herself beautiful and admired.

I requested Margery to show us some golden pheasants of her

own rearing, the feathers of which were of inestimable value to the angler; and she conducted us to a roomy, rough wine cage, embosomed among roses and seringa, proud to exhibit her favourites.

After these had been duly admired, Mr. Lestrangle complained of thirst, and I begged a bowl of milk for him; whereon Margery led us to her mother's dairy, a cool shadowy chamber paved with stone, and odorous with the perfume of eglantine and honeysuckle.

Here she made us welcome to such refreshment as the place could offer, and we loitered for some time drinking milk and eating cheesecakes of a substantial quality. I was surprised to discover how quickly Everard Lestrangle made himself agreeable to the rustic girl, contriving speedily to engage her in familiar conversation, and to amuse her by his talk of London, that marvellous city of which she knew less than she knew of fairyland.

We bade Margery good-bye, after she had promised to make us some flies against our next visit; and as we walked away from the cottage, my companion complimented me upon my good fortune in owning so lovely a foster-sister.

"Methinks thou wert born under a lucky star, Robert," cried the gentleman, in that affected style which I found afterwards to obtain among young men of his class.

"I do not know what you mean by good luck," I replied. "I love my foster-sister dearly; but I consider it no special good fortune that she should have grown up so handsome. Indeed, I doubt if beauty is the best of gifts for a cottager's daughter."

"Spoken like a true disciple of the saintly Noggers of Brewer's Yard, Warborough," cried Mr. Lestrangle with a sneer. "Beauty is a delusion and a snare, brother Jumper,—do you jump in Brewer's Yard meeting-house, by the way, or do you belong to the quieter folks who only preach and pray?—yea verily, comeliness of visage is but a snare to the wicked and a bait for fools; and 'tis better to be a flat-faced and pug-nosed damsel than a bright woodland siren, with great hazel eyes, in which the sunshine plays at bo-peep, and lips like ripe cherries."

I did not care to hear these florid compliments; and though at this time I knew but little of Everard Lestrangle, I resolved that I would take him to Jack Hawker's cottage as seldom as possible.

"One would think, by your raptures, you had fallen in love with my pretty sister," I said somewhat coldly.

"Why, thou simplest of rustics, such raptures are the common language with a man of the world where women are in question. We think and talk of them in hyperbole, and the

homeliest among them is angel or goddess before marriage. It is only after the honeymoon that we descend to the regions of fact, and confess that Lesbia is a slattern and Marcella a scold. As for your pretty woodland nymph yonder, it would fare ill with me should I lose my heart in that quarter; for so surely as I am a skilled observer of womankind, hers is already forfeited."

"To whom, pray?"

"To you, Mr. Demure; to you, who pretend to be unconscious of your power. Did you mark how ready the sly puss was to converse with me, and how bravely her beautiful eyes met mine, stranger as I am? But at a word from you the dark lashes droop, and the gipsy face reddens with a sudden blush. I would forfeit my chances of favour with the Duke of Newcastle to be in your shoes, were I free to wish."

I understood these last words to allude to his relations with Miss Hemsley. I hastened to assure him that he was mistaken as to Margery's sentiments.

"We regard each other as brother and sister, but no more," I said. "I have watched her cradle many a day when I was little more than a baby myself. We were together for nearly eight years,—constant playfellows and companions,—and the friendship between us has never been interrupted."

"And is that any reason she should not love you?"

"The strongest. I don't believe that love is ever born of custom and affection. 'Tis the sudden sight of a sweet strange face that first tells a man he has a heart."

Mr. Lestrangle stared hard at me, and I felt my cheeks crimson under his gaze.

"And what sweet strange face has Mr. Ainsleigh seen of late that has made him so wise?" he demanded with a sneer.

"I speak of love in the abstract," I answered, and hastily changed the conversation; but on several occasions after this I caught Everard Lestrangle watching my face with a somewhat unfriendly expression upon his own.

"The sudden sight of a sweet strange face." The words had escaped me unawares, and they hinted at a secret scarce known to myself. 'Twas the pale, white-rose face of Dorothea Hemsley that was in my mind.

And she was to marry this cynical worldling, with his sneers and affectations, because she had a fortune, and could advance her cousin's prospects! Remote and impossible a creature as she must ever be for me, I could but lament that family interests should assign her to so unfitting a partner; and I feared that so gentle a nature would never sustain any contest with the will of others, should the young lady's inclinations be opposed to the match.

This I had some reason to conclude was the case. I had seen Miss Hemsley and her suitor together, and had seen on her part an avoidance which was something more than maiden modesty. She was polite and gentle in her demeanour towards her cousin, as she was to the lowest servant in the house; but I observed that she artfully eluded all occasions of being alone with him. In order to do this she sometimes invited my companionship, and I was thus at an early stage of our acquaintance drawn into a dangerous intimacy with her. She volunteered to teach me chess, and instructed me in the performance of the simple symphonies and accompaniments to two or three easy bass songs by Handel and Gluck.

That these favours bestowed on me were displeasing to Mr. Lestrangle, I had, even at this period, no doubt; but he contrived to conceal his anger, and treated his cousin and myself with perfect amiability.

I found it no easy matter to keep my lady's stepson from the warreners' lodge, where he managed to make himself vastly agreeable to simple Jack Hawker and his simple wife, who thought this town-bred gentleman the most perfect specimen of courtesy and good manners. Margery brightened at our coming, and seemed always alike delighted to receive us; nor was I well pleased to perceive the rapid progress which Mr. Lestrangle appeared to make in her favour, since I had by this time become acquainted with the loose ideas and contemptuous opinions which he entertained of all womankind, from the duchesses whose favours he hinted at to the dairy-maids whose ruin he boasted. Towards me my foster-sister's manner was shyer and more subdued every time we met, but with Everard Lestrangle she gossiped and laughed with perfect freedom.

This gentleman often rallied us upon our secret attachment, and his jests covered the poor girl with blushes and confusion, much to the amusement of Jack Hawker, who saw no reason why his daughter should be an unworthy alliance for Lady Barbara's penniless protégé. I had told my old friends at the warreners' lodge nothing of my cousinship with the mistress of Hauteville, and they still regarded me as a nameless waif, dependent on the charity of my noble benefactress.

I did not, however, continue to afford Mr. Lestrangle occasion for his broadly expressed insinuations, which were embarrassing to Margery, and to the last degree painful to myself. As the summer advanced I spent less time in the woods, and left my lady's stepson to go fishing by himself, while I read with Lady Barbara and Miss Hemsley in the Hauteville library. My benefactress was well pleased to resume her studious habits, and we formed a little company of students, with Anthony Grimshaw for our preceptor. Together we read Virgil, Dante, and

Tasso, and my lady was so good as to express herself much pleased with my progress as a linguist.

"The dear boy has a rare talent for languages," said my gratified master, "and we have worked hard at the cultivation of foreign tongues, which of all accomplishments is the most valuable for a man who has to make his way in the world. For Greek and Latin I will match Robert against any lad of his age; he knows Italian thoroughly, and is a fair Frenchman; and he has, moreover, a smattering of Sanscrit, which may some day be useful to him."

"I doubt whether his knowledge of Sanscrit will ever serve him for much," my lady answered, smiling, "unless he should have a fancy for extending his travels as far as the court of the Great Mogul, or should turn Jesuit missionary and strive to convert the heathens of Birmah or Thibet. But the habit of study is a good one, and I am proud to think my cousin has been so diligent a pupil."

While I did my best to improve Miss Hemsley's Italian, which was far from equal to the obscurities of Dante, that young lady was so kind as to instruct me in the Spanish tongue, of which she had made herself mistress during her five-years' residence at Madrid. With this gentle instructress I speedily mastered the soft, sleepy syllables of that mellifluous language, and read *Don Quixote* in the original before our studies were concluded.

For these studies Mr. Lestrangle did not scruple to avow his contempt. He quoted Molière's *Femmes Savantes*, and christened my lady Bélise, and Dora Hemsley, Armande. He spoke of us as the Hauteville Blue-stocking Club, and suggested that we should invite Lord Lyttleton and Mrs. Montague to join the party.

I, for my part, was too happy to heed his sneers; days, weeks, and months slipped by, and I well-nigh forgot that I had ever been solitary in that house where my life was now so pleasant. My acquaintance with Dora Hemsley had ripened into friendship. She talked to me of my lonely boyhood, of her own happy youth, watched over by beloved parents, and of the bitter grief that fell upon her with the loss of them. She told me of Lady Barbara's tender kindness, and of the affection which had gone so far to supply the place of the lost. But of her uncle's desire to bring about a marriage between herself and his son she never spoke; nor was she ever betrayed into expressing any opinion respecting Everard Lestrangle. One day when Everard and she had been by chance alone together for some minutes, I surprised her in tears. Mr. Lestrangle quitted the room by one door as I entered by another, and I found Dora seated on one of the window-seats, with her arms resting on the broad stone sill, and her head and face hidden in her clasped hands. I saw the tears

trickling between the slender fingers, and had not sufficient command of myself to refrain from questioning her.

"Dear Miss Hemsley," I cried, "for God's sake tell me what distresses you!"

She lifted her head and turned her sweet face towards me bathed in tears.

"That I can tell to no one," she answered; I have my secret troubles to bear, Mr. Ainsleigh, though I am but just eighteen years of age; and I must endure them with patience."

I knelt at her feet, and begged her to believe that if the sacrifice of my life could have served her I would have freely given it. She turned her tearful eyes towards me.

"Yes, Robert," she said, "I think you would do much to save me from sorrow. But you cannot. I must bear my burden."

The sound of my Christian name spoken by her lips thrilled my soul like a strange sweet music. But at the same moment there came another sound that startled me. 'Twas the stealthy opening of a door. I looked up and saw Mr. Lestrangle peering in at us through a narrow opening, from the doorway by which I had seen him leave the room. Our eyes met, and he clapped to the door; but in that one instant I had seen the expression of his face, and never did I behold more malignity upon the human countenance.

I would willingly have pressed Miss Hemsley further, but she entreated me to refrain, and I left her, sore distressed by her grief, and only able to guess at its cause.

"Everard Lestrangle has been urging his suit with her," I thought; "'tis clear she does not love him."

And then I suffered my fancy to beguile me with a bright dream of what might have been if I had not been a penniless dependent, and Miss Hemsley a fortune; and I cursed the wealth which made an impassable barrier between us.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### NOW I BECAME AN ORPHAN.

I WAS pacing the long corridor of the upper story in a despondent frame of mind, when the door of my lady's dressing-room opened, and Mrs. Grimshaw emerged, more than usually sour of visage.

"You are wanted by my lady," she said on seeing me. "I have been urging upon her that such an idle life as you are



leading is not the way to fit a young man for earning his livelihood, and she is so good as to acknowledge the wisdom of my remarks."

"You are very obliging with advice that has not been invited," I answered; "but since I doubt if you have ever wished me well, I should be grateful if you would abstain from all interference with my affairs."

I knew that whatever influence this woman brought to bear upon my fate would be of an adverse nature, and I could not patiently brook her tone of patronage and superiority. She gave me a malignant glance, muttered something about a beggar on horseback, and passed on, while I went to Lady Barbara's dressing-room, a spacious and cheerful apartment, hung with prints and chalk drawings, and furnished with japanned cabinets containing shells, dried flowers, Indian china, and many valuable curios of the monster tribe. It was the room my lady had occupied as a girl, and which she preferred to any other apartment at Hauteville. A large embroidered screen in tent-stitch, representing the meeting of Joseph and his brethren, testified to her girlish industry; and half a dozen dogs of the pug species sprawling on a rug before the sunniest of the windows, revealed the hobby of her childless matronhood.

She was writing as I entered, but closed her desk immediately, and looked up at me with an affectionate smile.

"Sit you down here, Robert," she said, pointing to a stool at her feet; and I seated myself there, and took the hand which she offered me. Thus grouped, we seemed like mother and son.

"Robert," she began presently, "I think you know that I love you."

"Yes, indeed, dear madam; and your affection has made me very happy."

"Will you cease to believe in that affection if I should be obliged to make you unhappy?"

"I cannot believe that you will ever act unkindly."

"Not willingly, Robert, God knows. But you remember what Shakespeare makes his Hamlet say: we must sometimes 'be cruel, only to be kind.' Dear boy, I think we have all been too happy here; you and I and Dora Hemsley. Do you remember what I told you about Dora when we first came?"

"I am not likely to forget it," I answered gloomily.

"It was my manner of warning you, Robert. I cannot thwart my husband's wishes with reference to his niece and ward; I cannot, Robert, even to serve you. He was very generous when I asked leave to adopt you, poor orphan child; and it would ill repay his goodness if you became the instrument to bring about the disappointment of his favourite theme. He has set his heart upon his son's marriage with

Dora, and it must take place; or, at least, you and I must do nothing to prevent it."

"God forbid it should ever come to pass!" I cried.

"Why, Robert, have you anything to say against Everard Lestranger?"

"Not much, except that I do not like him; and I can scarce tell you wherefore. *Non amo te, Sabidi, nec possum dicere quare—*"

"Heavens, how like that was said to your father! Ah, Robert, I doubt you inherit his headstrong, impetuous disposition."

I smiled, remembering how quiet and submissive had been my youth; and yet I was inclined to doubt whether under certain exceptional circumstances a fiery spirit, to which I was at present a stranger, might not reveal himself as my master. Surely if for every man there watches and prays a good angel, so each has his familiar demon, an invisible director stronger than himself, who leads him where he would not go, and urges him to deeds he would fain leave undone.

"Robert," said my benefactress suddenly, after a little pause, "I have watched you and Dora together, and I think it would be well for the peace, nay, indeed, for the honour of both, that you should part."

"I am ready, madam," cried I, springing to my feet with a start. "I know that there is a gulf between that bright angel and me. Send me away this day—this minute. I am ready to go."

I dashed a tear from eyes as I spoke. My lady watched me with a sad, perplexed face.

"O Robert," she cried, "has it come to this?"

"Yes," I answered. "Your warning has been forgotten; love her. I will not come between your stepson and his fortune. I love her; but I am not so base a viper as to sting the breast that has warmed and sheltered me. I will not bring trouble on you, dear lady. From these lips Dora Hemsley shall never hear that she is beloved. O, let me go; let me leave this dear place, where for the last few months I have tasted such dangerous, such fatal happiness."

"Yes, Robert, you must go. It will be wisest and best that you should begin life at once; and your future will be my care, dear boy, do not doubt that. And so my gentle Dora has won your heart? 'Tis but a boy's love, a brief fever, more easily cured than you can believe while the disease rages. But do you know, Robert, that I have heard of another passion of yours?"

"How, madam?"

"That pretty brown-eyed girl at the warrener's lodge, Margery Hawker—what of her, Robert?"

"She is my foster-sister, and as dear to me as ever sister was to brother. Who told you she was more than that, Lady Barbara?"

"I have been *told* nothing; but I have had hints."

"Shame on the hinters, madam! People who mean well can afford to speak plainly. I can guess who is at the bottom of this."

"Perhaps there are more than you think, Robert. Do not be so angry. If you have pledged your heart to poor little Margery, keep your faith with her. Better to have a peasant-girl for your wife, than a guilty conscience and the bitter memory of having broken an honest woman's heart."

"I swear to you, dear madam, that Margery has never been more to me than my foster-sister, and never will be. I know that she is beautiful—lovelier than Miss Hemsley, even; but she has never touched my heart, as one look of that young lady's touched me on the first night of her coming here. I think there must be some element of magic in such spells, innocent as they seem."

"I cannot doubt you when you speak so boldly. But O, Robert, let there be no broken hearts—no ruined lives. There has been too much of that already."

I looked at her wonderingly, and she answered my inquiring glance.

"Your father's heart and mine, Robert—your father's life and mine—both broken, both ruined, for want of a little more candour, a little more patience, a little more constancy. I loved him so dearly! Yes, that is why you are as dear to me as ever only son was to doting mother. I cannot tell you how happy we were as boy and girl together, or how devoted he seemed to me. I know that in those days he was all truth, all goodness. There was no hidden evil in that proud young heart. He had his faults, perhaps, but they were the failings of a knight-errant. Who can say that Sir Philip Sidney was faultless? and we know that Raleigh was a sinner. His errors were ever those of a great mind. O God, how easy it is for me to pardon and pity him now; I who was so unforgiving then, when my pardon might have saved him! When he came from the University I thought him changed, and there was one about me who took care to call my attention to the change, and by-and-by to assign a cause for it. Martha Peyton, now Martha Grimshaw, my conscientious, confidential, trustworthy maid, discovered an incipient intrigue of my cousin's, and brought me speedy news of it. Mr. Ainsleigh was always hanging about Parson Lester's vicarage, she told me. Mr. Lester was a hunting-parson, renowned for his knowledge of horses and his veterinary skill, and this might fairly be the

magnet that drew Roderick to his house. But my confidential maid would not have me think this. Mr. Lester had an only daughter, a pretty, empty-headed girl, and Martha hinted that it was for her sake my cousin haunted the vicarage. I had seen the girl at church, and had invited her to tea in my dressing-room, and given her a cast-off gown now and then, to the aggravation of my confidential Martha, who was inclined to be jealous of intruders. I knew that Amelia Lester was weak, and frivolous, and pretty, and I believed my informant. I had no civil word for my cousin after this, and would hear neither explanations nor apologies, which at first he fain would have made. The breach grew wider day by day. O Robert, I was madly, wickedly jealous. I hated my rival, my false lover, myself, the whole world. One day I met Roderick and Amelia together in the park, the girl simpering and blushing under her hat, my cousin with the conqueror's easy, self-satisfied air. He did not even blush on meeting me, but passed me by with a cool nod and smile of defiance, while Miss Amelia dropped me a low curtsy, with her eyes cast modestly to the ground. After this meeting I scarcely deigned to speak to my cousin, and suffered unspeakable torments with a haughty countenance. Women have a genius for self-torture. I would have given worlds to bring Roderick to my feet, to be assured that I alone was beloved by him. Yet I obstinately repelled his advances, and neglected every opportunity of reconciliation."

"Your mind had been poisoned, dear madam," I said; for I knew but too well Mrs. Grimshaw's hard, cruel nature, and could now perceive that her hatred was a heritage that came to me from my father, whom she had pursued with that fury which the poets tell us to be worse than the hate of hell.

"Yes, my mind had been poisoned," replied my lady; "my confidante, from pure conscientiousness, no doubt—but there are no people can wound like these conscientious friends—kept me informed of my cousin's doings. His visits to the vicarage were notorious. Miss Lester had boasted everywhere of her conquest. "Everywhere" is a vague word; but I was too angry, too miserable, to insist upon particulars. And then, was I not heiress of Hauteville? and should my cousin affect the most ardent devotion, how could I believe him? My confidante took occasion to remind me of my wealth; these prudent people have such sordid notions. Had I known the world then as I know it now, Robert, I should have valued your father so much the more for the pride that held him aloof from me after my numerous repulses had chilled and wounded him. But I believed myself deserted and betrayed for a person whom I considered my inferior; and when my

father's anger was aroused by the discovery of certain debts which Roderick had concealed from him, I made no attempt to act as peacemaker. Then came a long and stormy interview, which resulted in my cousin's abrupt departure from Hauteville, never again to sleep beneath this roof. He went without a word of farewell. My father declared he would return, and I too hoped long in the face of despair. O Robert, for me those were the days of retribution. What a long heart-sickness, what a weary agony! For a year I listened and watched for Roderick Ainsleigh's return. Every sound of a horse's hoofs in the distance, every sudden stroke of the great bell, every messenger or letter-carrier who came to this old place, raised hope that was awakened only to be disappointed. My confidential maid fell ill of the small-pox soon after my cousin's departure, but that fatal malady passed me by, though I would fain have courted any death-stroke. Within six months of Roderick's disappearance Amelia Lester left her father's house, secretly, as it was rumoured, though the parson affected to know where she was. She had gone to some relations in Somersetshire, he said, and as no one but he had any right to be angry, the assertion was suffered to pass unchallenged; except by Martha Peyton, who contrived to extort the truth from a servant at the vicarage. The young lady had been missing one morning, and the father had raged and stormed for a while, and then had cursed her for a worthless hussy, saying that no doubt she had run after Roderick Ainsleigh, about whom her head had been turned for the last three years. This was the story Martha told me, and she wanted to bring the vicarage servant to confirm it. I told her I required no confirmation of my cousin's baseness, and that she need trouble herself no more about my affairs. But the blow struck none the less severely because I was too proud to show the pain. I was so steeped in misery, that my father's sudden death shocked me much less than it would have done at any other time; and when it was suggested that I should visit an aunt in London, I consented listlessly, with some faint sense of relief in the idea of leaving Hauteville."

"And there came no tidings of my father, even on the death of his benefactor?"

"No; but I have since had reason to believe that Roderick attended his uncle's funeral. A figure in a black cloak appeared among the group around the mausoleum in the park. The funeral was celebrated at night, and the stranger, who kept aloof from the rest of the mourners, drew upon himself the notice of the torch-bearers. One of these afterwards declared that he had seen either Mr. Ainsleigh or his ghost."

"And did you never see him again, Lady Barbara?"

"Never, Robert, never. No sign reached me to tell if he were still amongst the living. I will not enter into the manifold reasons that prompted my marriage, which was not in any sense a love-match. Sir Marcus knew that I had no heart to give, and was content to accept my esteem and obedience. Nor have either of us, I believe, had reason to repent our union. Sir Marcus has ever proved a kind and indulgent husband, and my life has been happier than that of many a woman who marries for love. But I have not forgotten my girlhood, Robert, and all my old hopes and dreams and troubles come back to me when I look upon your face."

She opened her desk and handed me an oval morocco case, containing a miniature. I recognised the countenance I had seen in the oil-painting shown me by Anthony Grimshaw, that dark strongly-marked face which bore so close a resemblance in feature and complexion to my own.

"You grow more like him every day," said my lady. "That miniature was his only gift to me. 'Twas painted before doubt or anger had arisen between us."

"And did you never hear more of him, madam?"

"Yes, Robert. Six months after my marriage a letter reached me—a letter from my cousin Roderick. It was long and wild, telling me how I had been beloved, and how my coldness had angered that proud heart. I have the letter in this desk, but every word of it is burnt into my memory, ineffaceable as the graver's work upon metal. 'If I could not be happy with her I loved, I could at least be wretched with one who loved me,' he wrote; 'and I found a faithful creature, Barbara, who was gladder to unite herself to my broken fortunes than a wiser woman would have been to follow a better man.' And then my poor proud Roderick went on to confess that he had fallen very low, so low that his sole hope for the partner of his wretchedness rested on my compassion. 'And you showed a great contempt for this poor creature once, Barbara,' he added."

"He had married the parson's daughter, then?"

"Ay, Robert, she was the sharer of his sorrows."

"Will you let me see my father's letter, madam?"

My lady hesitated for some moments, and then took the paper from a secret drawer of her desk.

"I know not whether I am wise, Robert," she said, "but perhaps it is best you should learn all that I can tell you."

She handed me the letter, written on tavern paper, in a bold, clear penmanship, which was not without some family resemblance to my own.

Together Lady Barbara and I read the faded lines:

"I stood amongst the crowd that watched your wedding,

cousin," continued the writer, "as I had watched unseen on a former occasion. I needed not the confirmation of that ambitious alliance to prove that you had never loved me. You but yielded to your father's wish that his sister's son should share his daughter's fortune, and were but too glad to find an excuse for breaking my heart. Great Heaven, what a wretch am I to reproach you!—a tavern-haunting, plotting reprobate to dare upbraid my lord ambassador's lady because she is cold and cruel, and severed from me by a gulf that fate, or her pride, or my folly has dug between us! Ah, Barbara, I am very tired of this wearisome struggle, this muddled dream of a drunkard, called life. If I should make a sudden sinful end of it, wouldst thou have pity on a poor faithful wretch starving in a lodging near St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street? 'Tis at a dyer's, 17, Monk's Alley, a narrow court betwixt the church and the Temple—hard for a fine lady's footman to find, but not beyond the ken of charity. Go to her soon, Barbara Lestrangle, if thou wouldst have one poor woman and her infant snatched from the many who perish unknown under the gracious sway of our beneficent Hanoverian ruler. A helpless woman and an infant cry to you, cousin. The child is of your own blood. But the messenger waits, and my paper will hold no more. I bribe him with my last sixpence to carry this letter to St. James's Square. God grant he may be faithful! God grant Amelia and my child may find you kind! 'Tis perhaps the last prayer of your wretched humble servant,

"RODERICK AINSLEIGH.

"ROSE AND CROWN TAVERN, SOMO,

"November 15th, 1731.

"N.B.—Inquire for Mrs. Adams. I have spared the pride of my family, and am only known to the companions of my poverty as Robert Adams."

"As our evil fortune would have it—and there seemed ever to interpose a cruel fate between Roderick and me—I was away from London when this letter was brought; and the shabbiness of the messenger bespeaking no respect from the porter who received it, the poor letter was laid aside with bills and petitions, and other insignificant papers, to await my return. The date of my cousin's appeal was a week old when I received it, and, prompt as I was to seek Monk's Alley, I was too late to see him whose face I so longed to look upon once more. I found only a dying woman—the very ghost of that vain village beauty whom I had known as Amelia Lester—and a sickly child. This poor wretched soul was too far gone in fever to recognise me. She raved deliriously of her Roderick, and it was piteous to hear her

implored him to come back. Even in this dying state she tried to nourish her child, until the dyer's wife, a decent, charitable creature, who had received no rent for many weeks, took the babe into her care. For a week your mother lingered, Robert, and I visited her daily, and gave her such succour as was possible. She was past cure when I found her."

"And had my father deserted her?"

"No, Robert. From the dyer's wife I learned that your father had ever been kind to his companion in misery. He had come home intoxicated sometimes, roaring tipsy songs about wine and women, but had never been harsh to the poor soul, who watched and waited for him and loved him with unchanging fidelity. Sometimes he had stayed at home gloomy and brooding for days together. The woman believed that he had lived by writing political pamphlets for the booksellers. Once he had written something treasonable, and had been threatened with a prosecution, and had lain in hiding for several weeks. For a year and a half he had lodged in this mean, stifling alley, in this bare, wretched garret, while all Hauteville, of which he was to have been master, lay dark and empty and desolate for want of him. There never was a stable-help in my father's service lodged so meanly as his once-beloved nephew. Ah, Robert, the thought of this stung me to the quick. 'Let him come come back, and I will share my fortune with him,' I said to myself, forgetting that my fortune was no longer mine alone, and that I had given another the right to counsel, if not to dictate, my disposal of it."

"And he never came back?" I asked breathlessly.

"Never. He had been missing a week when I found Amelia. He must have disappeared on the very night when his letter to me was written. But the dyer's wife was not alarmed. He had often absented himself for two or three days at a time, it appeared. Yet 'twas strange, she owned, so kind a gentleman should desert a dying woman. He might have been taken to some prison, for debt, or libel, or treason. I caused the lists of every prison in London to be examined, but did not find my cousin.

"I sent my agent to the booksellers to inquire for such a pamphlet-writer. One among them knew him well as Mr. Adams of Monk's Alley, and had given him frequent employment, but had of late found no work for him. The town was beginning to tire of patriotism spiced with treason; Church and State had been reviled and ridiculed till not a rag was left from which to spin an essay. If a new Butler had arisen to write a new *Hudibras*, the book would scarce have sold. I knew by this that Roderick's means of livelihood had failed him before he had written to me; and, taking this in conjunction with



that hint of a sudden sinful end to his wretchedness, I could not fear that my unhappy cousin had destroyed himself."

"Was he so miserable as to commit that sin?"

"No, Robert, he did not perish by his own hand; yet I know not if his end were less sinful. He fell in a midnight brawl at the tavern where his letter was written, and on the very night on which it was dated—a most wretched, profligate haunt near Soho Square. He had been buried ten days when my agents traced him; and so wretched is the manner in which the poor and friendless are sepulchred in that vast wealthy city, that when I fain would have had the corpse exhumed, that I might look on the familiar face once more, and convey the remains to some more fitting resting-place, I was told that this was impossible. Into those festering charnel-houses where the obscure dead are thrust it is death to enter; nor could the men who buried the nameless stranger remember into which grave they had flung his unknown remains. It was only by means of a letter found upon him that my wretched cousin was traced. This letter—addressed to Mrs. Adams, of Monk's Alley—had been preserved by the keeper of the dead-house where the corpse was carried after the miserable drunkards' brawl in which your unhappy father perished. The man who slew him escaped in the confusion that followed his death. I doubt not that in such places they favour the escape of a murderer rather than be called to bear witness at his trial."

"And the letter, dear madam—did that tell you much?"

"But little. 'Twas only a few lines of farewell to the unhappy Amelia. It convinced me, however, that my cousin had left her with the intention of never returning. He bequeathed her and his child to my compassion. Whether he had indeed meditated self-slaughter, as his letter to me hinted, or whether he intended to seek new fortunes abroad, when death by an assassin's hand overtook him, I know not. His ashes rest among the bones of paupers in St. Anne's churchyard, Soho, in which parish is the tavern where he fell; and all that affection could do for his memory was to put up a tablet in the church, inscribed with his name and the date of his death."

"Affection for his memory has done more than that, dear lady: it has cherished his orphan son."

"That is but a poor atonement, Robert, from her whose pride helped to destroy him. If I could have brought him back to life by the sacrifice of my own, I would have done it; but I could do nothing for him, though but two short years before one word of mine might have saved him. This is what makes the burden of our sins so heavy—there is no undoing them. Pride is a luxury that is apt to cost us dear, cousin."

"Did you find a certificate of my mother's marriage amongst my father's papers, madam, which I presume you examined?"

"No, Robert. I did indeed ransack an old leathern portmanteau crammed with papers, and poor ragged clothing, and tattered books. The papers were for the most part rough proofs of pamphlets, and odd pages of manuscript, so scored and blotted as to be almost illegible. Scattered amongst these were a few tavern-bills, and notes from boon companions, signed but with Christian names or initials, and all bespeaking the wild reckless life of him to whom they were addressed."

"And there was nothing more?"

"Nothing. Any more important papers your father had doubtless destroyed, not caring to leave the evidence of his former estate behind him. As he had suppressed his real name, it was natural he should do away with all documents revealing it."

"I am sorry you can give me no record of my mother's marriage," I answered sadly.

Lady Barbara was silent, and I knew thereby that she doubted whether any religious ceremonial had ever sanctified the luckless union to which I owed my birth.

I inquired presently where my mother was buried.

"In the graveyard of St. Bride's Church, near which she died," replied Lady Barbara. "Her father had been dead six months when I discovered the poor creature; and to have carried her remains to Pennington, where he had lived, would have been only to cause scandal. It was better that the poor soul should rest in the great city, where all private sorrows and domestic shipwrecks are engulfed and hidden beneath the stormy public sea."

"All that you did was for the wisest, dear madam," I replied, kissing the beautiful white hand which was the bounteous giver of all my earthly blessings.

"And now, dear Robert, I want to act wisely in planning your future," my lady said gently. "I cannot give you a fortune, but I hope I may help you to make one. I have concluded that with your learning the Bar would be your best profession; and I would have you proceed to London without delay, and enter yourself at the Temple, where you can study at your ease under the direction of a respectable gentleman to whom I can recommend you, and of whose kindness I have no doubt. I shall give you a starting sum of two hundred pounds, and will give you as much every year until your profession shall afford you a comfortable livelihood, since I wish you to live like a gentleman, yet with strict economy. I will not weary you with the hackneyed warnings against the perils of London life, but I will only bid you to remember the sad end of your father's

reckless career. If you will not take counsel from the awful lesson, you will be warned by nothing. But I hope much from your love of learning, and the natural steadiness of your disposition."

How could I find words to acknowledge so much goodness. I knelt at my cousin's feet and kissed the dear hands, which I bedewed this time with grateful tears.

"Come, come, Robert, you take these things too seriously," cried my lady, with affected gaiety. "Let us talk of your journey. Foolish boy, I am in haste to be rid of you! Shall you be ready to leave us in a week?"

"It is my duty to be ready whenever you please."

"Ah, Robert, do you think it pleases me to banish you? But Sir Marcus would have no mercy if you came between him and his ambition. Yes, in a week, dear child; it will be best and wisest."

I was still kneeling at the generous creature's feet. She laid her hand lightly upon my hair, and bent her stately head until her lips touched my forehead; and with a tenderly motherly kiss she dismissed me.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### I FALL INTO DISGRACE.

'Twas now late in October, and bleak autumn winds were fast stripping the park and woods of summer foliage. For some time past I had seen but little of Mr. Lestrangle, who spent the greater part of his time out of doors, and left Miss Hemsley free to follow her own pursuits, and to give as much of her company as she pleased to Lady Barbara and myself. She seemed happy with us, after a subdued fashion of her own, but was never beguiled into gaiety; and I could not refrain from the idea that her spirits were oppressed by the sense of a bondage which she had not the courage to shake off.

Mr. Lestrangle, for his part, appeared to take little trouble to secure her good graces. He treated her sometimes with a free and easy politeness, sometimes with an ill-concealed anger; and bitter and biting were the speeches which he occasionally addressed to her. His insults she received with a noble dignity; and nothing could be more cold than her acknowledgment of his compliments.

One day, in a moment of vexation against this dear young lady, the gentleman was so ill-advised as to betray his anger to me.

"She hates me," he cried savagely, "and lets me see that

she hates me, and knows that I see it. But what of that? she will marry me all the same. My father means it, and I mean it, and when the time comes her whims and caprices will serve her no more than the fluttering of his wings serves a snared bird. Do you think that weak, timid creature would dare set her will against my father's—her legal guardian, and trustee to her fortune—and say no when he says yes? 'Tis all very well to give herself airs and graces with me, but she knows that her fate is as fixed as if she had been bought in the slave-market of Ispahan."

"That is a hard way to talk of a woman whom you pretend to love," said I.

"Who says I pretend to love her? I make no pretence: but I mean to marry her. Mark that, Mr. Ainsleigh, and let no puppy-dog who values his ears come between her and me."

Upon this we came to high words, and might have perhaps proceeded to blows, but were happily interrupted before we arrived at that extremity.

I cannot describe the contempt which I entertained for Everard Lestrangle after this revelation of his character. I held myself as much aloof from him as possible, whereupon he affected to treat me with a haughty distance, and took no pains to conceal the fact that he considered me infinitely his inferior.

He had been absent from Hauteville several times during the summer and autumn, having business which compelled him to go to London, as he informed us; though I judged from his father's offended manner on such occasions, that these visits were by no means so necessary as Mr. Lestrangle pretended.

He was absent at the time of my confidential conversation with Lady Barbara, and did not return until the next day, when he affected extreme surprise on hearing of my intended departure.

"And are you going to mount a stool in a scrivener's office, or to try your fortune in trade, Master Bob?" he asked, with a supercilious grin.

"Neither," I replied; "I am going to read for the Bar."

"Indeed! with a view to becoming Lord Chancellor, I suppose?"

"With a view to doing my best to prove myself worthy of the kindness I have received," I answered.

"Heavens! what a starched prig thou art!" cried Mr. Lestrangle; "but I'll warrant when once thou hast thy liberty in London thou wilt waste more time in taverns, and run after more milliner-girls than the wildest of us. For a thorough-going rakehell I will back Tartuffe against Don Juan, with long odds."

Miss Hemsley also heard of my plans with surprise; and I

could not but think that her manner betrayed despondency. Our Spanish studies were abandoned.

"It is not worth while going on," she said; "a week is soon gone, and you must have so many preparations to make. I fear you will soon forget your Spanish."

"Never; nor yet the kind mistress who taught me," I answered warmly; and then we both stood silent, confused, and downcast.

"I hope we shall see you sometimes in town; we are to spend the winter there, you know," she said at last.

"I hope so, dear Miss Hemsley."

"But surely you will come often to St. James's Square?"

"If Lady Barbara bids me, I shall only be too happy to come."

"And you—my aunt's cousin—will wait to be bidden? How ceremonious you have grown all at once!"

"Life has pleasant dreams, dear young lady; but sooner or later the hour comes in which the dreamer awakens."

"What does that mean, Mr. Ainsleigh?" she asked, with a timid, half-conscious smile.

"It means that I have been too happy in this dear place, and that the time has come in which I must bid those I love farewell and begin the battle of life."

With this I left her, having already said more than I cared to say.

The first half of my last week at Hauteville passed only too quickly. I packed my trunks, which were amply furnished with the clothes supplied by the Warborough tailor, and a box of books, chiefly neat duodecimo volumes of the classics, which Lady Barbara bade me choose from the library.

My good Anthony assisted me to select these, and showed much regret at my approaching departure; while his sour wife expressed only one sentiment, and that a contemptuous surprise that a learned profession should have been chosen for me.

"I suppose you would rather starve as a fine gentleman than grow rich in a city warehouse," she said.

"I prefer a profession which befits my parentage, but have no more desire to become a fine gentleman than I have present fear of starvation," I answered coldly.

"You carry yourself with a high spirit, Mr. Robert; but I have seen prouder spirits than yours brought to the dust."

As the time for my journey drew near, I bethought me that I must bid good-bye to my old friends of the warreners' lodge, and I blushed as I remembered how small a place those kind, honest creatures had of late occupied in my thoughts; nor had I seen them many times during the last few months, since I had preferred to absen myself altogether from the cottage rather

than to go thither accompanied by Mr. Lestrangle, whose manner of rallying me on a supposed secret attachment between myself and Margery was to the last degree unpleasant.

When my trunks were packed, and while Everard Lestrangle was in London, whither he had gone suddenly and in hot haste a day or two before, I walked down to the dear old cottage where my childhood was spent. I found my foster-mother alone at her spinning-wheel, from which she rose to greet me. One glance at the familiar face showed me that its natural cheerfulness was exchanged for an anxious gravity, which at once puzzled and alarmed me.

"Oh, Robin, what a stranger thou art!" she cried, as we shook hands.

"And even now I have but come to bid you good-bye, daughter-mother."

The good soul was grieved to lose me, little as I had of late done to prove myself worthy her affection. She talked, however, of the wonderful change of fortune that had befallen me, and rejoiced in my altered prospects, even though good fortune was to carry me away from old friends.

"I shall always remember thee a babe in my arms, Robin," she said tenderly. "I may call thee Robin still, may I not? though they tell me thou art called Mr. Ainsleigh at the great house. Jack and I always suspected as much."

"Suspected what, mother?"

"That thou wert Roderick Ainsleigh's son. Why, thou hadst his very face from a baby; and others suspected the same, or knew it, maybe. That is why Martha Grimshaw has always hated thee."

"Why should she hate me for being Roderick Ainsleigh's son?"

"Because she loved Roderick Ainsleigh. Yes, Robin, I was house-maid at Hauteville Hall in those days, and servants sometimes know more than their betters. Martha Peyton was mad for love of Mr. Ainsleigh, and was fool enough to fancy he loved her. I'll not say that he did not make her a fine speech now and then, or steal a kiss when he chanced to meet her in the corridor, but 'twas no more than such court as any fine gentleman may pay to his sweetheart's waiting-maid; and Roderick Ainsleigh had neither good nor evil thoughts about Martha, who was no beauty at the best of times. But she took it all seriously, and was always hanging about wherever her lady's cousin was to be met, and would run a mile to open a door for him; and when his marriage with Lady Barbara was talked of in the servants' hall Martha would laugh and say nobody would ever dance at that wedding. But one day she said something to Mr. Ainsleigh that let him know she thought he

was paying serious court to her, and he burst out laughing, and told her the truth,—that he had given her kisses and compliments and guineas because he wanted her good word with her mistress. I came upon him in the corridor as he was saying this, and saw Martha's face. 'Twas black as thunder. She stood fixed like a statue on the spot where he left her, staring like one that was struck blind or foolish, and after this time I never saw her speak to Mr. Ainsleigh. If she met him she dropped him a low curtsy, and passed on. And I think from this time she began to plot mischief against him. When she found she couldn't have him herself, she was determined nobody else should have him."

"Why didn't you warn Lady Barbara?"

"I warn her? Do you think she would have suffered me to talk of her business? and could I turn informer against a fellow-servant? You don't know what the servants' hall is. Besides, I didn't think Martha could do much mischief, though I knew it was in her heart to try it. 'Twas only when Mr. Ainsleigh went away that I knew there was real harm done. Ah, Robin, 'tis a hard world we live in, and full of trouble?"

She gave a heavy sigh, and I saw her eyes fill with tears.

"Yes, dear mother, for some of us; but God forbid trouble should come to you."

"It has come, Robin," she answered, gazing at me with an eager, scrutinizing look that I had never seen in her face before. "I have but one child, and to see her sad is the worst of sadness to me."

"Margery sad?" cried I; "when last I saw her she was as gay as a woodland fairy."

"When last you saw her? do you see her so seldom, Robin?"

"Except at church, I have not seen her for weeks. You must not take it unkind that I have stopped away; I have had good reasons."

"Ay, Robin, good reasons I doubt not. But have you never met Madge by chance in the woods all this time? She spends much of her time in the woods. 'Tis hard to keep her indoors in fine weather, and she is not so easily managed as she once was. Oh, Robin, my child is wretched, and I cannot find out the cause; and 'tis breaking this poor heart!"

And here the poor creature burst into tears. I tried to comfort her, but her tears flowed only the faster.

"She is wretched, Robin, and will not tell her mother the cause of her grief. Oh! if thou didst not love her, why didst thou beguile and deceive her with fine words and promises?"

"I beguile! I deceive! Mother, as God is my judge, I have never spoken to Margery but as a brother should speak to his

sister. I have never loved her with more or less than a brother's affection, and I would not let the man live that should deceive or wrong her."

"Ah, Robin, thou speakest fair, but I know the child loves thee. Her father and I have joked her about thee many a time, pleased to see her blushes and smiles. We did not think thou couldst fail to love her, and we did not know they would acknowledge thee for Roderick Ainsleigh's son, and make a fine gentleman of thee. Yes, Robin, she loved thee better than a sister loves a brother, and I thought she was loved in return; others said as much."

"What others?"

"Martha Grimshaw and Mr. Lestrangle. He told me thou wert mad for her."

"He told a lie. Those two are my enemies both, and would be glad to do me a mischief. But, mother, I do love my little foster-sister, and if it will ease your mind to see her my wife, I will marry her when you will. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw, and might turn the heads of wiser men; but 'twas my fate not long ago to see a face that bewitched me, and to give my love where it can never be returned. Shall I waste my life in weeping for a shadow? No, dear mother; give me Margery for a wife and I will work for her honestly, and be as true a husband as ever woman had."

"Nay, Robin, I will not beg a husband for my daughter. Thou dost not love her as we thought thou didst. 'Tis ourselves we must blame for judging amiss. All I know is that the child has some trouble on her mind, and I thought thou mightst be at the bottom of it."

Again she scrutinized my face with anxious looks, and then turned away, shaking her head sorrowfully.

"There is something amiss," she said, "but I know not what."

"You spoke just now of Mr. Lestrangle," said I. "Has he been hanging about this place of late?"

"No, Robin; I'll have no fine London gentleman about my place. He came two or three times without you, but I gave him sour looks that told him he wasn't wanted; and the last time he was here, full two months ago, he told me he was going to London for the rest of the year."

"And since then you have seen him no more?"

"No."

"Yet he has not been all the time in town. He has run backwards and forwards, but has spent most of the time at Hauteville."

I remembered his broadly-declared admiration of the rustic



beauty; I considered his hideous code of morals, and trembled for my innocent foster-sister.

"God defend her from such a libertine!" I thought, and blamed the selfishness that had kept me so long away from the warren's lodge.

I would fain have seen and talked to Margery before leaving Berkshire, and so waited for some hours in the hope that she would return, but she did not come. Jack Hawker came home to his supper, but his manner was cold and sullen, and I perceived that some dark suspicion had turned the hearts of these two friends against me. I left the cottage at last, disheartened and uneasy, and returned to Hauteville, there to spend a somewhat melancholy evening with my patroness and Miss Hemsley.

The next day returned Mr. Lestrangle, and soon after Sir Marcus, who had been on a visit to a nobleman's seat in the adjoining county. I spent the morning *tête-à-tête* with Anthony Grimshaw, while Lady Barbara and Miss Hemsley drove to the nearest town to pay visits and make purchases. It seemed sad to me to lose their company on this, almost the last day of my residence at Hauteville; but I felt it was a fortunate accident which divided me from Dorothea Hemsley. In her presence I found it hard to fetter my tongue, and Lady Barbara's reproachful looks often reminded me of my imprudence. Soon, too soon, was I to be separated from her for ever; for I felt that, once away from Hauteville, I should be as remote from her as if we had been inhabitants of different planets.

The day wore on; we dined in stately solemnity; and I was pacing the terrace alone, awaiting a summons to take tea with the two ladies in the long drawing-room, when I was accosted by a footman, who came to inform me that Sir Marcus Lestrangle wished to speak with me in his study. It was the first time he had ever sent for me; but I concluded that he was about to offer me some parting advice, or to favour me with a valedictory address. I therefore obeyed without any sentiment of uneasiness, regretting only that if the diplomatist should prove tedious, I might lose my privileged half-hour with the ladies.

The study in which Sir Marcus spent so many hours of his life was a dark and somewhat gloomy oak-panelled apartment, furnished with bookcases containing ponderous folios, and with numerous oaken chests and iron cases, which I supposed to contain papers. A carved-oak desk occupied the centre of the room, and on this, though it was not yet quite dark, some half-dozen candles were burning in a brazen candelabrum.

My patron was not alone; a solemn assembly had been convoked in haste, and I found myself placed before these as a

prisoner at the bar of justice. Lady Barbara sat opposite her husband, pale as death; Miss Hemsley close beside her, with an anxious, distressed countenance. Next to his father stood Mr. Lestrangle, and I thought he greeted me with a glance of triumph as I entered the room. At a respectful distance from the rest appeared Mrs. Grimshaw, and I knew her presence boded ill to me.

"Mr. Ainsleigh," began Sir Marcus, in a severe magisterial voice, "you have been rescued from abject poverty; you have been received into this house and liberally entertained for the last ten years of your life; you have enjoyed the education of a gentleman, and, finally, you have been admitted into the bosom of this family on a footing of equality, much to my regret, and all by the charity of Lady Barbara Lestrangle yonder."

"No, Marcus," said my lady, "I will not have it called charity."

"By what other name would your ladyship call it? What claim, legal or social, had your cousin's bastard upon you?"

At sound of that bitter epithet, my lady winced as if she had been struck. "It ill becomes you to call him by so cruel a name," she said; "we have no knowledge that his mother was not lawfully wedded to my cousin Roderick."

"Have we any proof that she was? Mr. Ainsleigh's reputation is against the probability that he would make an honest woman of a parson's runaway daughter, who left her home to follow him."

"I cannot stay here, sir, to hear my mother belied."

"You will stay here, sir, as long as I please."

"Not to hear you speak ill of the dead; that I will not suffer. I am fully conscious of the benefits I owe to Lady Barbara, and thank her for them with all my heart, and in my prayers morning and night; but I know not why I am called hither to be reminded of my obligations, or what I have done to deserve that they should be cast in my face with so much harshness."

"You know not what you have done!" cried Sir Marcus. "I suppose you are impudent enough to pretend not to know that John Hawker's daughter has left her home secretly, as your mother left hers?"

"Indeed, I know nothing of the kind, nor do I believe that it is so. I was at the warrener's lodge yesterday afternoon, and heard nothing of this."

"And the girl ran away last night. Oh, no doubt you laid your plans wisely, and now you act astonishment as naturally as Garrick himself. But Hawker is in the steward's room; you will look otherwise when you see him."

Here Miss Hemsley would fain have left the apartment, but Sir Marcus forbade her.

"Indeed, sir, I have nothing to do with this," she said; "I beg to be allowed to retire."

"No, Dorothea, I must bid you stay. This gentleman has been a favourite of yours, I hear; it is well that you should discover his real character."

"O sir, you are very cruel," the girl murmured tearfully.

"If Margery Hawker has left her home, Sir Marcus," I said, "there is no one will regret it more than I; and there is no one less concerned in her leaving."

"What! you will swear to that, I suppose?"

"With my dying breath, if needs be. Yes, at the very moment when my soul goes forth to meet its God."

"I believe him," cried Lady Barbara. "It is not in my cousin's blood to tell a lie."

"You will have cause to change your opinion presently, madam," replied her husband, coldly; and then, turning to me, he went on, "you are a perjurer and a blasphemer, sir, and your own hand is the witness against you. Have you ever seen that before?"

He handed me an open letter, written in a hand so like my own, and with a signature so adroitly counterfeited that I stood aghast, with the paper in my hand, staring at it in utter bewilderment.

"Come, sir, the play has lasted long enough, and 'tis time you answered my question. I think you'll scarce deny your knowledge of that handwriting."

"I know the handwriting well enough, Sir Marcus, for it is the most ingenious forgery that ever was executed; but I never looked upon this paper before."

"Great Heaven, was there ever such an impudent denial! And you protest that you never saw that letter till this moment?"

"Never, sir."

"Perhaps you will be so good as to read it aloud for the benefit of the company, especially for Lady Barbara, who believes in your innocence?"

"I am quite willing Lady Barbara should hear this vile forgery, sir," I replied, and then read the letter, which ran thus:—

"DEAREST MARGERY,—For fear there should at last be some mistake about the coach, I write in haste to bid you remember that it leaves the 'George' at Warborough at nine o'clock at night. Your place is taken, and you have nothing to do but alight at the 'Bull and Mouth' in the City, where you will ask for Mrs. Jones, who will meet you there without fail. She is a good motherly soul, and will take care of you till you are joined by one who loves you better than life, which will be in three days

at latest. And then, beloved girl, far from those new grand friends who would divide us, I will teach thee how faithfully this heart, which has long languished in secret, can love the fairest and dearest of women.—Ever and ever thy fond lover,

“ROBERT AINSLEIGH.”

“What think you now, Lady Barbara?” asked Sir Marcus.

“As I have a soul to be saved, madam,” cried I, “no word of that vile letter ever was penned by this hand!”

“There are some folks to whom a false oath comes easy, sir,” said the baronet. “You did not think that letter would fall into my hands; it was intended for your victim, who would have cherished the precious paper hidden against her heart, I dare swear. Unluckily for you, the post played you false, and the letter was delivered this morning, twelve hours after the bird had flown. The wretched broken-hearted father of this weak and wicked girl brought it down to me, and calls upon me to punish the traitor who has ruined his child.”

“That, sir, I trust you will do; if Providence helps me to find him,” I answered, looking straight at Mr. Lestrangle, who received my gaze without flinching. Was he not, by his own account, steeped to the lips in vice, and past-master in the art of dissimulation? “But as for that letter,” I continued, “I again protest, and for the last time, that it is a forgery.”

“And pray, sir, is there any one so much interested in your insignificant fortunes as to take the trouble to counterfeit your handwriting?”

“It is always the interest of an enemy to work mischief, sir; and there are few creatures so insignificant as to escape all enmity. Again, sir, self-interest may have prompted the forging of that letter. The traitor who is really concerned in the flight of this dear girl would best escape the consequences of his crime by shifting it upon the shoulders of an innocent person.”

“I have not condemned you hastily, sir,” said Sir Marcus.

“Here is a sheet of Spanish exercises in your hand, with your signature scribbled at the bottom of the page. I have carefully compared the letter with this paper, and I find the signatures agree to the most minute curve.”

“Conclusive evidence that the letter is a forgery, sir,” I replied boldly. “Experts in handwriting have agreed that no man ever signs his name twice alike; there is always some minute difference. A will was once pronounced a forgery upon that very ground—the several signatures at the bottom of the several pages were all precisely alike.”

“I see, sir, you have already learned to advance precedents and argue like a lawyer. Perhaps you will be less eloquent when confronted with the father of your victim.”

Sir Marcus rang a bell, and ordered the servant who answered it to send in John Hawker. There was a dead silence while we waited his coming. I heard the slow, shambling step of my foster-father on the stone floor of the passage, and my heart bled for him in his trouble.

He came slowly into the room, and stood amongst us, with his bare head bent by the first shame that had ever bowed it.

"Your foster-son denies that he wrote the letter which you brought me this morning, Hawker," said Sir Marcus, in his hard magisterial voice.

"I know naught of that, sir; I can't read writing myself. I took the letter to the parson at Pennington, and he read it to me; and when he came to the name at the bottom, I'd as lieve he'd put a knife through my heart as have read that name to me."

"It is clear that some person has tempted your daughter away. Is there any one except Robert Ainsleigh whom you could suppose concerned in her flight?"

"Nay, sir, the poor child had no acquaintance except Robin yonder, and your son."

"My son! Do you pretend to rank my son amongst your daughter's acquaintance?"

"'Tis likely enough he'll do so," cried Mr. Lestrangle, with a contemptuous laugh; "Ainsleigh took me to his cottage once or twice to get some artificial flies for trout-fishing."

"Ay, sir, and you came many times afterward without Robin, and won all our hearts by your pleasant familiar ways, till my wife bethought herself 'twas a dangerous thing to have a fine gentleman hanging about the place, and let you see that you wasn't welcome any longer."

"Why, fellow, it is three months since I crossed your threshold."

"And if you had crossed it but yesterday, Everard, I do not suppose this man would dare accuse my son," exclaimed Sir Marcus indignantly; "and that in the face of a letter which proclaims the real delinquent."

"I accuse no one, sir," replied Jack Hawker; "I only know that my child has left me and her mother, and broken two loving hearts."

On this I turned to my foster-father.

"John Hawker," said I, "you yourself have had as much hand in this miserable business as I have. I have ever regarded your daughter as my dear foster-sister, and my conduct to her has always been that of a brother. I told your wife as much yesterday, before this trouble arose; I tell you so to-day. But if you can find her, and bring her to me, an honest woman, I will make her my wife, and cherish and honour her as such as long as I live; though I will hide from no one here that I have bestowed

my heart elsewhere, where I have no hope that it can ever be accepted, and can never give her a lover's passionate affection."

"I protest that is an honest man's offer," cried Lady Barbara.

"Ay," sneered her husband, "your hopeful protégé promises to marry the girl if her father can find her; rely on it, your honest man will take care she is not found; that good motherly soul, Mrs. Jones, will know how to guard her charge.—And now, sir," he continued, addressing himself to me, "understand that you are found out, and stand convicted under your own handwriting, and that no cry of forgery will serve you, however impudently persisted in. You will therefore oblige me by quitting this house to-night at your earliest convenience, and you will further comprehend that Lady Barbara washes her hands of you, and that any communication which you may hereafter take the trouble to address to her will be returned to you with the seal unbroken."

"Honoured madam, my dear kinswoman, does this gentleman speak your will?" I asked, looking straight at my benefactress.

"There are circumstances, Robert, in which a woman's will must needs be that of her husband," Lady Barbara replied.

"In that case, dear madam, I submit. No unconscious wrong which you may do me in the present can cancel my debt of gratitude for the past. I was doomed to leave this dear place. That I leave in unmerited disgrace can add but one more pang to the anguish of parting."

I bowed low to my lady and to Miss Hemsley, and turned to quit the room; but before going I approached my foster-father.

"Jack," I said, offering him my hand, "you cannot think me so base a wretch as this vile counterfeit letter would make me? Shake hands, and bid me God speed; and if it is possible for a man that's ignorant of the town, I'll find your daughter."

"Ah, Robin, thou know'st but too well where to find her. 'Tis thy name that's wrote at bottom of the letter. The parson said so, and he'd not tell a lie. I'll never shake thy hand again, Robin, for thou'rt a villain!"

This stung me more sharply than the abuse of Sir Marcus. I left the room hurriedly, ran to my own chamber, and packed a portmanteau in haste with my immediate necessities. The rest of my luggage was ready packed; but this I left to be sent after me, leaving it to Lady Barbara's pleasure whether I had the things or not.

With the small portmanteau in my hand, I ran downstairs. It was now dark; the lamps were not yet lit, and the great hall was but dimly lighted by a wood-fire. I was leaving the house, when a door in the hall was softly opened, and I heard my name whispered.

It was Lady Barbara who called me. She was standing just within the door of a small waiting-room near the grand entrance.

ordinarily used by footmen and humble visitors. She took my hands in hers and drew me hastily into the room, which was lighted by one wax taper. Even in that dim light I could see she had been weeping.

"Dear child," she cried, "it is hard to part with you thus; but our enemies are too strong for us, and we must submit. My little child lies in the cemetery at Madrid, and I am not allowed to cherish my cousin's orphan son."

"Oh! dear madam, you do not think me guilty? Say but that, and I am happy."

"I say it with all my heart, Robert. The letter is a forgery, and it is all a base plot against you, because I am mistress of my own fortune, and might bequeath it to you. What do I say? My husband is incapable of such infamy; but there are those who would hesitate at no villany that would bring them wealth and power. You are my adopted son, Robert, remember that. Nothing can sever that tie between us—no, not even ill-conduct or ingratitude of yours—for I am more charitable now than I was when my pride slew your father. Do not answer me, I have but a few stolen moments to give you. Take this note-book; it contains all the ready money I can command to-night, and there is a letter in it, a few hurried lines of recommendation, which you will carry to Mr. Swinfen, of Paper Buildings. You will go straight to London, and you must write and tell me how things prosper with you. Write to me under cover to Mrs. Winbolt, at 49, Long Acre—she is my milliner, and a good soul. And now, good-bye. Stay, I am to give you this from Dora: it is a book she has used for the last five years."

It was a shabby duodecimo volume, which I put in my breast, too much moved for words. If it had been some jewelled box containing the relics of St. Peter, it could scarce have exercised a more healing influence upon the sore heart that beat against it.

"God bless her and you, dear cousin, and farewell!" and with this I wrung my kinswoman's hand, and left her.

The autumn night was chill and bleak, and the full moon rode high above the sombre leafless woods as I left Hauteville. The little book in my bosom—a Spanish translation of the *Imitation of Christ*—and the memory of Lady Barbara's goodness were the only consolers that I carried with me into the world of which I knew no more than an infant. Once, and once only, did I look back at the old Elizabethan mansion, with lighted windows glowing in the distance. O God, how long before I was again to look upon those walls! What perils by land and perils by sea, what agonies of hope deferred and dull despair, was I to suffer before I revisited that familiar spot!

## CHAPTER IX.

## I GO TO LONDON.

It was at the George Inn, Warborough, that I spent the wretched night of my departure from Hauteville; but not in sleep. Slow and dreary were the hours, as I lay in a small room of the inn, thinking of all I had lost, and the utter loneliness of the life that lay before me. I had opened and kissed Miss Hemsley's little Spanish volume, and had striven to pin my mind to those pious sentences of Kempis, or Gersen, or whoever else was the saintly creature who had composed them. But my spirit was too wide of that calm mystic region which the recluse inhabited, and I could not yet bring myself to take comfort from a consoler whose experience had so little in common with my own sorrows. I could but lay the precious volume under my pillow, as a charm or talisman, and then lie broad awake thinking of my hard fate, which had from my very cradle—nay, before my birth itself—made me a mark for the poisoned arrows of hate.

I had not even so much curiosity as to open the note-book thrust upon me by my generous mistress. What cared I how rich or how poor I was to enter on my strange, friendless life? It was enough for me to know that my dear benefactress still loved and trusted me; and this knowledge was more precious to me than all the wealth of the Great Mogul, of whom I had lately read in the Jesuit Bernier's travels.

Before leaving Warborough I made all possible inquiries about the missing girl for whose absence I had been so unjustly blamed. After much questioning, and going from one person to another, I found one of the hangers-on of the coach-yard, who remembered to have seen Jack Hawker's daughter leave by the night mail, so close-hooded that it was only by accident he had caught a glimpse of her face, which he remembered by having seen her at market with her mother. He wondered what should be taking the girl to London, and made bold to ask her whether she was going out to service; but she had answered only by a shake of her head.

On this I went to the coach-office and questioned the clerk who booked the passengers' places; but here I could discover nothing to cast light upon Margery's departure. The places had all been engaged by persons of the male sex, but the clerk remembered one of these persons saying that the single place he engaged was wanted for a young woman. I sought in vain to obtain a description of this man. The clerk could only tell me that he looked like a gentleman's servant.



"I suppose you know all the servants at Hauteville Hall by sight?" I said; but the young man replied in the negative.

"Was the man who took the place short and stout, with reddish hair?" I asked.

"I rather think it was some such person," replied the clerk; "but as I didn't observe him closely I would scarce venture to be positive. He seemed in amazing haste to be gone."

The person I described was Mr. Lestrangle's valet and confidential follower; for I could not but think that gentleman was at the bottom of my foster-sister's flight, and had forged—or ordered the forging of—the letter which flung the guilt on me. I had good cause to know him as an unprincipled profligate, by the witness of his own lips; and I had heard his broadly-declared admiration of Margery. Nor could I forget the malignant look which he had given me when he surprised me on my knees at Miss Hemsley's feet. To gratify his own wickedness, and at the same time to ruin me in the estimation of my Hauteville friends, would be a double stroke of mischief to delight that cruel and treacherous nature.

I arrived in London at dusk, and great was my wonder at the vastness of the city; the gaudy, painted signs of merchants and chapmen swinging across the street; the sedan-chairs with running footmen carrying flambeaux, which we met at the court-end of the town; the pitch-blackened heads of the Scottish rebels rotting on Temple Bar; the roar and turmoil; the noisy hucksters and impudent beggars who assailed the coach-door; the newsboys bellowing and blowing horns with as much excitement as if the Pretender had again landed on our shores, or the king been stabbed in his coach by some Jacobite desperado. At any other time I should doubtless have been both amused and delighted by the strangeness of these things; but my heart was burdened with too many cares and troubles, and I looked upon all I saw as on the scenes that pass before one's eyes in a dream—mere confused pictures in which one has no part.

It was, of course, too late to deliver my letter of recommendation to Mr. Swinfen, so I lay at the inn where the coach stopped, and spent another sleepless night in a stifling chamber, the one small window whereof opened upon a covered gallery that ran round the inner quadrangle of the house. The strange noises, the brawling of some drunken revellers in an apartment below, the arrival of ponderous waggons and coaches which lumbered into the court-yard long before cock-crow, would have deprived me of slumber even if my own uneasy thoughts had not been sufficient to keep me awake; and at cock-crow began

shrill cries and bawlings of hucksters in the street without, mingled with a constant rumbling of wheels.

Never, I think, had I known the meaning of the word solitude until that bitter morning, when I seated myself in a darksome little den, or partitioned corner of the coffee-room, called a box, and breakfasted alone in London. Crusoe on his desert island had at least the animal creation wherewith to consort; but I, in all this vast metropolis, knew not so much as a dog. Nor did the friendly looks of strangers invite my confidence. Roughness and impoliteness marked the manners of all I had hitherto encountered. Even the waiters seemed to regard me with suspicious looks; and I doubt not that my gloomy face and dispirited manner were calculated to inspire curiosity and disgust. The man who cannot face the world with a smile is likely to be suspected of having some sinister cause for his despondency. I breakfasted quickly, and it was but eight o'clock when I had finished—too early an hour, most certainly, for a ceremonial visit to Mr. Swinfen. Nor had I the smallest inclination to explore the town, of whose wonders I had heard so much. What are sights and wonders to the man who has just been abruptly torn from all he loves? St. Peter's at Rome may be at his elbow, and he will scarce raise his weary eyes to look at it. The shadow of Pisa's leaning tower may slope across his pathway, and he will hardly take the trouble to glance from the shadow to the substance. I sat listlessly, with my arms folded on the little table before me, listening idly to the talk of customers ordering breakfast, and waiters attending upon them.

I had sat thus for nearly an hour, when I bethought myself of Lady Barbara's note-book, and, to while away the time, set myself to examine its contents. It was a memorandum-book, originally of some twenty pages, but all except three of these had been torn out. One silken pocket was crammed with bank-notes, which I unfolded, and found to amount to near three hundred pounds. But in another pocket there was something more precious than these bills on the directors of the Bank of England. This was an oval crystal locket, with gold rim, containing a miniature likeness of my dear lady, and a lock of dark hair, which I knew for hers. Nor was this all the comfort hidden in the tiny volume. One of the pages was inscribed with sentences of hope and counsel in Latin and English, hastily written for my consolation by the hand of my dear benefactress:—

*"Sperate, et vosmet rebus servate secundis.*

"The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord. . . . Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

"The wicked plotteth against the just.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in His way.

"Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.

"*Tu fortis sis animo, et tua moderatio, constantia, eorum infamet injuriam.*"

I was thus rich in money and in friendship; and I began to feel that to persist in a dull and obstinate despair when so much yet remained to me would be beyond measure sinful. How different must have been my feelings if Lady Barbara and Dora Hemsley had believed in my guilt! as they might reasonably have done, considering the ingenious evidence that had been contrived against me. Revolving this in my mind, I resolved to face my position boldly, supported by the hope that my own actions might be made to prove the falsehood of my enemies. "I have my future all before me," I thought; "and my own master. Hitherto I have been a child in leading-strings; my manhood dates from to-day, and it shall be my study so to plan my life that treachery itself cannot assail it. I am not of so proud a nature as my father, and I freely accept this money from the hands of the dear lady to whom, under Providence, I owe my very life; nor is there any painfulness in the knowledge that I am so much indebted to her. I have youth, strength, and an excellent education; and it must go hard with me if with these weapons and a resolute fortitude I do not conquer in the battle of life. But I have first to learn something of the battle-ground, of which at present I know no more than a baby."

I called for a newspaper, hoping therefrom to learn something of what was stirring in this busy city, to which I was so utter a stranger; but the *Daily Courant*—a sheet which the waiter brought me—gave little information on this head. It was chiefly taken up by our foreign politics, the enormous subsidies or gifts granted to the Empress Queen and certain German princes; by which it appeared that Britain had been made to pay very dearly for a peace that was worse wanted by her allies than by herself. One paragraph that attracted my attention was an account of a new colony that had just been formed in Nova Scotia. Four thousand persons, with their families, had lately embarked for this wild, unknown region, tempted by the liberality of the Government, which offered a free passage out, and a freehold of fifty acres to each settler, with ten years' exemption from all taxes.

"Why should I not go thither," I thought, "and flee like a new Æneas from the ashes of my Troy? In that new world, if I had no friends, I should have at least no enemies, and I might make myself a name and a home amongst settlers as friendless as myself."

The thought was but for a moment. What would home or friends, or name be to me without Dorothea Hemsley?

"Perish the thought of new lands across the sea," I said to myself; "I will stay in England and be near the dear girl I love, perhaps to serve her in some hour when she may need the strong arm of a faithful friend."

To this bold outburst followed sudden despondency. Alas, poor wretch! should I be any nearer Dora at London than at Nova Scotia? She was severed from me by a gulf more impassable than that sea which the American emigrants had traversed under command of Colonel Cornwallis.

At noon I left the inn, and inquired my way to the Temple. Being now in a somewhat more hopeful frame of mind, I regarded the bustle of the streets with curiosity, and was even amused by the strangeness of all I saw. My way took me again near the gloomy arch which I had ridden under in the coach, and I looked up with a shudder towards those ghastly severed heads which were impaled there as bloody memorials of a nation's severity. I could but think this dreadful exhibition eminently calculated to keep alive the Jacobite feeling which Lady Barbara had told me was by no means drowned in the blood that had been shed since '45, and I wondered much at the foolish policy which had elevated traitors into martyrs.

I was much pleased with the tranquil and studious air of the Temple, whose shadowy courts and solemn squares seemed to me to bespeak it a retreat for learning. I had yet to discover how such appearances may deceive, and how many a shallow pate drinks and games away existence in a suite of chambers, the very atmosphere of which whispers of a Bacon or a Selden.

Mr. Swinfen's apartments I discovered in a handsome row of houses commanding a view of the river, on which I saw innumerable boats plying, and all the pleasant water-traffic I had read of in the *Spectator*. Towering grandly above all meaner roofs I saw the noble dome of St. Paul's, and beyond many spires and steeples dimly blue in the hazy distance, for there was a notable difference between the sky that overarched this city, and the clear ether above Hauteville Woods.

The gentleman to whom I was recommended was happily at home, and received me with much graciousness.

"I would do a great deal to serve any relative of Lady Barbara's," he said courteously, after he had read my patro-

ness's letter; I knew her father, and I remember her ladyship before she married Lestrangle. She spent but one short season in London before her marriage, and would have been one of the reigning belles of that season but that she was too modest to appear much in public. And so you are an Ainsleigh? Are you nearly related to that Roderick Ainsleigh of whom Lord Hauteville was so fond?"

"I am his only child, sir."

"Indeed! I did not know he lived so long as to marry."

I felt my face flush at this.

"His marriage was an obscure one, sir, and he died in poverty. But for Lady Barbara's goodness I doubt if I should be living to tell as much. I owe everything to her."

"And I am glad to see that you are proud to acknowledge your indebtedness," replied Mr. Swinfen kindly.

After this he talked much to me, examining me as to my education, and directing me in the course which I should have to take in order to prepare for entering the profession which had been chosen for me. I will not linger over the details of this period of my life, since the labour I devoted to the study of the law was wasted work. The career which I thus began was destined to have neither middle nor end, but to be abruptly cut short almost at the outset. Fate called me to a harder life than that of a law-student, and it was my lot to play my humble part in a more stirring drama than was ever enacted in that grave sanctuary of legal lore in which I now took up my abode.

My patron kindly sent one of his clerks with me to hunt for a set of chambers suited to my purse and position.

"You cannot practise too much economy at the outset of your career," said Mr. Swinfen, just before he dismissed me.

"Advancement at the Bar is a plant of slow growth, and the man is lucky who, after some eight or ten years' patient industry, can command bread and cheese, and wear a decent coat. But if the struggle be a hard one, the prizes are splendid; and the man of parts who can dine on a red herring and a dish of tea, or a fourpenny plate of beef from the eating-house, may hope to mount the woolstack. I trust you have an inward conviction that you are destined to be Lord Chancellor, Mr. Ainsleigh?"

"Indeed no, sir," I answered, smiling.

"Then I am sorry for it. Every man who passes the Temple gate should say to himself, 'Bacon or nothing!'"

"And suppose it is nothing, sir?"

"For such a man there is no possibility of utter failure. In trying for the highest rung of the ladder he will at least contrive to scramble to the middle. But for the fellow who enters his name at the Temple because it is a genteel thing to do, who spends his nights at Vauxhall, and wastes his substance at

cards and in cock-pits, and brings loose-lived women to his chambers, and cheats his tailor to sport a suit of cut velvet in the Ring, the road he travels is the highway that leads to the dogs. I hope you are not come to London to be a man of pleasure, Mr. Ainsleigh?"

"I have little inclination for pleasure, sir, and not a single acquaintance in this city."

"So much the better," growled Mr. Swinfen; "and now go along with you, for I have half-a-dozen attorney fellows waiting in the next room. My clerk will find you decent chambers, and will see you safely through the formalities of your entrance. Good-day. Dine with me on Tuesday next, at four o'clock, at my house in Queen Anne Street. I have a haunch from a ducal demesne which will be in prime order by that time, and you will meet some gentlemen from whom a nod in public is a patent of social standing for a youngster."

I thanked Mr. Swinfen for his kindness, and departed in company of the clerk, a decent elderly person, who quickly found for me a couple of small rooms in a house in Brick Court, which was afterwards destined to become famous as the abode of genius and poetry. The rooms were at the top of the house, and commanded an extensive view of roofs and chimney-pots; but they were cheap, and of this advantage I was fully conscious, as I was bent on extreme economy in my management of Lady Barbara's handsome gift.

When all preliminary ceremonies had been duly gone through, at an outlay which absorbed a good deal of my dear benefactress's money, Mr. Swinfen's clerk left me, and as I stood alone in my somewhat cheerless garret, I felt that now I had begun the world in real earnest.

I sent to the city inn for my portmanteau, and went out myself to purchase certain books which Mr. Swinfen had informed me were necessary for me to possess, at the same time that he offered me free use of his own noble library of law-books, which he bade me to convey to and fro from his chambers to my own, as I needed them.

On the following Tuesday I dined at my patron's house, amongst a party of gentlemen, the youngest of whom was at least twenty years my senior. The talk was of politics and of legal matters. I heard much of the Duke of Newcastle and his brother, Mr. Pelham, and of that rising politician, Mr. Pitt, then only paymaster of the forces, but already exercising considerable influence in the senate. There was also much discussion of the great will case of *Barnsley versus Powell* and others, that had been decided in the previous year, and the details of which had lately been published by a bookseller in Fleet Street. To this and all other conversation I listened with re-

spectful interest, pleased to hear the discourse of clever members of that profession in which it was my earnest desire to prosper.

And now began for me a life of the extremest loneliness. Secluded day after day in my garret-chambers—waited on at rare intervals by a deaf old woman, who came and went with a stolid mechanical air, and looked at me with a dull unseeing gaze as she flourished her well-worn broom or knelt to light my fire, as if scarce conscious of my existence—I was little less remote from the world than if I had been the pious inmate of some cave hewn in the solid rock by one of Iona's early Bishops.

On the days when I dined in hall I did certainly exchange some civil commonplaces with my companions at table, but these were would-be beaux, who knew the town, and boasted loudly of their acquaintance with fine gentlemen and their conquests among fine ladies. I was indeed at once horrified and disgusted by the tone in which these scoundrels talked of women of quality, whom I have since discovered they knew only by name. Sometimes towards evening I found my spirits oppressed by an almost painful sense of solitude. I felt a desire to hear my own voice, nay, sometimes even a panic-stricken notion that I had lost the faculty of speech, so strange sounded the syllables when I tried to roll out a few lines of Demosthenes, or demanded with Cicero how it came to pass that, for the last twenty years, no man had been my enemy who had not also shown himself a foe to the republic.

On these occasions, when my eyes ached with long hours of reading, and my head was heavy from the continuance of study, I snatched up my hat, ran downstairs, and went out in the fog and drizzling rain, or in the bleak winter wind, to loiter in the crowded streets, and amuse myself with the busy life about me. And in this the hermit of London has a supreme advantage over the rustic solitary. Friendless he may be, but never quite companionless, for in every coffee-house or city tavern he can find company which, if not select, is by no means uninteresting. While my legal education progressed steadily in the solitude of my garret-chamber, the streets and the humbler class of coffee-houses enlightened me as to the ways of the world. I learned to talk politics, became vastly familiar with the affairs of the Prince of Wales and his party, railed against the old king for his devotion to ugly women, reviled the Duke of Cumberland, growled at the money taken from us by the Prince of Wolfenbützel, and eagerly perused the adventures of the young Ascanius, a romantic history of the Chevalier Charles Edward's adventures in the year forty-five. I purchased this luckless hero's bust in plaster, which was at this time much sold in London. Indeed, so warm were the feelings of this young

prince's partisans, that a wealthy squire in Staffordshire went so far as to clothe a fox in scarlet military coat, and hunt him with hounds clad in tartan.

I remembered what Anthony Grimshaw had told me of my father's sentiments on this subject, and was already at heart a staunch Jacobite. Nay, I think the frequent sight of those ghastly trophies on Temple Bar would in itself have been sufficient to inspire me with sedition. But in the character and fortunes of the Pretender there was an all-powerful magnet which drew to him the youth of the nation. What generous lad or sentimental woman would be faithful to an elderly German ruler while the brave young heart of an exiled prince was pining in obscurity, dependence, and banishment; and while the country from which he was excluded seemed to have gained so little by its ill-treatment of him?

I had lived in London three months, and had eaten my Christmas dinner at a tavern in Fetter Lane. Once only had I heard from Lady Barbara, though I had written to her at the milliner's address several times. Her letter was long and kind. She gave much comfort and wise advice, but, alas! little news of her whose name alone would to my eyes have shone upon the page as if written in starlight. Of my foster-father and his wife the charitable lady wrote with deep tenderness. Nothing had been heard of the poor runaway, and the hearts of father and mother were all but broken. Lady Barbara had been many times to see them. Sir Marcus and his family were to come to London in January, and then my dear benefactress said she would contrive to see me, though it must needs be by stealth.

From this letter I derived new comfort; to this promised meeting I looked forward with eager hope. Should I see *her* as well as Lady Barbara? Alas! I knew that no good could come of any meeting between us two. But none the less eager was my longing—none the less sweet the dreams in which sleep restored my lost happiness, and I fancied that Dora and I were seated side by side in the sunny window at Hauteville, with our books about us, as we had sat so often in the summer days that were gone.

It was while I was looking forward to the arrival of the family in St. James's Square, that a change took place in my mode of life, and the loneliness of my humble chambers was exchanged for company which I found sufficiently agreeable.

I had returned to my chambers late after treating myself to a sight of Shakspeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which was then being played at the rival houses, at one Garrick and Miss Bellamy, at the other Barry and Mrs. Cibber, on which the wits declared that one saw at one house *Romeo and Juliet*, at the other, *Juliet and Romeo*. Several distinguished members



of Mr. Garrick's company had withdrawn themselves to Covent Garden, and there had been complaints made of him in a prologue, whereon Mrs. Clive replied sharply in an epilogue spoken by her at Drury Lane, and there was thus war between the patent theatres. It was to see Garrick that I had spent my shillings, and the delight afforded me by that great man's genius had amply repaid me for my extravagance.

It was black as Erebus on the staircase leading to my garret, but I was accustomed to the crazy old stair, and mounted quickly without tripping. But close by my own door I stumbled against some heavy body.

"Who is this?" I called out, surprised.

"A wretch who would be lying on a door-step in the open street if he were not sheltered here. You are new to London, Mr. Ainsleigh, and should have some spark of charity's divine warmth yet left in your heart. I crept here at dusk, thinking to find you at home, and have lain here in hiding ever since. Will you give me a supper and a night's shelter?"

"I would rather give you the money to pay for them," I answered, "since you and I are strangers."

"That is your true London charity—alms given at arm's length," replied the stranger with a sneer. "I don't want your money, I want your friendship."

I could see nothing of the man's face or figure in the darkness, but he spoke like a gentleman, or at least a man of some education.

"Come, Mr. Robert Ainsleigh," he continued, "you had best take me into your chambers, and strike a light. We shall understand one another better when we see each other's faces. I do not come to you as the first that offers, and a crown from you is not the same to me as another man's five shillings. For the last week I have been hanging about the Temple, where I was once a student-at-law, and have watched you come and go. I like your face. I feel an interest in you that I don't feel in other men, because you are beginning life pretty much as I began it, and with the same chances before you. You stand almost alone in the world, as I did, and you belong to a good old family, as I do."

"How do you know all this?"

"From a clerk at Swinfen's, who remembers me when I was a gentleman. Come, Mr. Ainsleigh, you had better unlock your door and strike a light."

I had no inclination whatever to admit this forward stranger into my rooms, but yielded weakly, because I knew not how to refuse. I opened my door, and the unknown followed close upon my heels, as if determined I should have no time to change my mind. When I had managed to light my solitary

candle I turned and scrutinized this new acquaintance as closely as the feeble glimmer of the tallow-candle would allow me.

He was a man of from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age, with a face that had once been handsome, but which was prematurely worn by care or dissipation. He wore no wig, but his light-brown hair, plentiful at the back though his brow was bald, was tied with a greasy black ribbon. His clothes were of the shabbiest, but had once been fine. His eyes were gray, large, and penetrating; but I was at this time too bad a judge of countenance to perceive their sinister expression. As it was, however, his face did in nowise prepossess me, and when I too weakly yielded to him I was influenced by his conversation alone. He had groped for a chair while I lighted my candle, and sat by my cheerless hearth, shivering.

"Let me light your fire," he cried, espying the fuel in a box by the rusty fender. "I can make a fire as well as any Temple laundress, and cook a steak better than most of them."

He suited the action to the word, and was on his knees piling up coals and firewood in the little grate before I could object.

"And now, Mr. Ainsleigh," he said, flinging himself into a chair when the fire was lighted, "let us talk reasonably. You are a solitary young man, just beginning the world, with fair prospects of success, and with, I have no doubt, a decent allowance from your aristocratic kinswoman."

"What right have you to be so certain of my business?" I asked angrily.

"The right which knowledge of the world gives to every man who is not an arrant blockhead. I know you are living on money from your kinswoman by the left-hand——"

"Sir!"

"Pshaw! let us have no affectation of anger. What if I knew your father? I'll not say I did, but I know those who knew him. I know you are a dependent on the bounty of Lady Barbara Lestrangle, and that you were turned out of doors by her husband."

"Oblige me by carrying your knowledge elsewhere, sir. It is close upon midnight, and I do not care to be entertained with your version of my biography."

"I want to show you that I am no flatterer, and that I can beg without licking the shoes of my patron. Come Mr. Ainsleigh, you want a servant, and I want a master. Give me a closet to sleep in, or let me lie on the mat at your door. You pay your laundress something, and I will do her work for nothing. I know more law than many a prosperous counsellor, and can give you some help in your studies if you will consent to take it from such a vagabond as I. I can valet you, and cook

for you, run on your errands, and show you the town, which I know by heart, and which is a profounder science than you may fancy. I want a shelter—and a friend.”

“Friendship is scarcely won by such means as you employ.”

“Say, then, an acquaintance, a companion. Some one fresh and young and true, with whom a battered wretch may consort to the profit of his soul and body. Mind you, Mr. Ainsleigh, I am a beggar to-night, but not a beggar always. I suppose you have heard of that notorious beast of burden, the bookseller’s hack? That is my species. I have a prose translation of Homer that I hope yet to turn into cash, in a portmanteau in pawn at my last lodging.”

“From the Greek?”

“No; from Chapman. I know something of Greek, too, but we bookmakers prefer adapting the labours of a predecessor. I have also a history of that strange extinct race the Amazons, which I think might tempt Mr. Cave, could I but approach him in a decent coat.”

It is needless to dwell longer on my conversation with this gentleman, whose persuasion ultimately prevailed with me. That he was a man of some education and had fallen from a better estate was very obvious; and this touched me, for I remembered that my father’s condition must have much resembled that of this penniless stranger. And then common humanity pleaded for this unfortunate. Could I, who had been reared by charity, refuse a shelter and a crust to another? True, the man might be a rogue, but benevolence first feeds and clothes the reprobate, before it essays to reform him. Swayed by these considerations, I consented to share my lodgings with the stranger. I assisted him to make up a bed on the floor of my sitting-room, selected for him a few articles from my well-stocked wardrobe, and promised that, so long as he proved honest and I had money, he should not starve. And thus, on the very threshold of manhood, I suffered myself to be coaxed into an alliance with a vagabond, of whom I knew nothing save that he was impudent and persevering.

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## CHAPTER X.

### A DANGEROUS COMPANION.

WHEN I arose next morning, I found my breakfast comfortably prepared, the room swept and dusted, and the charwoman who had hitherto attended me dismissed, while my new acquaintance, dressed in the clothes I had given him, presented a decent, and

even gentlemanlike appearance. He certainly had not exaggerated his handiness, for my room looked cleaner than ever it had done under the *régime* of my deaf laundress; and the steak which he had cooked for my breakfast might have gratified the senses of a Lucullus.

He would fain have breakfasted off the fragments of my own meal, but this I refused. If he was good enough to live with me, he was good enough to eat with me. I had a lurking consciousness that I had done a foolish thing, but felt that I could not amend my folly by a haughty treatment of my unknown companion. While we breakfasted, he gave me a brief sketch of his career and fortunes.

"My name is Philip Hay," he began; "and I am the son of a parson, a man of some learning, but a poor spirit, who spent his life in the seclusion of an agricultural district, neglected his flock while he read the classics, and brought up his family on the produce of his garden and pigstye. I can hardly remember wearing a shirt that was not ragged, or a coat and breeches that had not served my elder brother faithfully before they fell to my share. At our table butcher's meat was not the rule but the exception; and I am somewhat inclined to attribute my want of moral stamina to that deficiency of beef from which I suffered in my boyhood. Butcher's meat is the foundation of your true Englishman. I will not say that my father gave me a good education, for he suffered me to pick up the crumbs of his learning very much as the cocks and hens that stalked about our carpetless parlour at meal-times were accustomed to pick up the fragments of each repast. I may say without boastfulness, since my education has never been of the smallest use to me, that I had a natural aptitude for learning. Nothing in the way of scholarship came amiss to me. I knew my Greek alphabet before I was breeched, and read Erasmus in the original while other lads were blundering over their first declension. This early proficiency soon attracted the notice of neighbours, who, entirely unlearned themselves, were disposed to regard me as a juvenile prodigy; very much as they would have done had Nature gifted me with two heads, or enriched me with a superfluous arm. My reputation at twelve years old spread as far as the mansion of a wealthy nobleman, who sent for me one day when he had a house full of company, and bade me repeat an ode of Horace, and specimens of other classic poets, for the amusement of his guests. The result of this exhibition was an invitation to spend the holidays with my lord's son, an idle but by no means stupid young jackanapes, whom my learned example might possibly convert to industry. My father was but too glad to accept such an invitation; friends and neighbours declared that my fortune was made; my mother patched and turned the

soundest of my clothes, and my father pledged his credit to procure me the first suit of new ones I ever owned. I left home in high spirits, ingratiated myself at once with my patron's son, Viscount Escote, whom I was so fortunate, or so unfortunate, as to amuse, and whose friendship or fancy I was soon master of. With this young gentleman I spent the merriest, and indeed the happiest, period of my life, and the acquaintance thus begun was not destined to lapse. The boy had a warm heart, and I had perhaps reason to love him even better than I did.

"Lord Escote's tutor, a very grave and pompous gentleman, was at first inclined to object to his pupil's affection for my society, but as I speedily discovered this pedagogue's incompetency, and was able to pose him at any moment by a seemingly innocent inquiry about a crabbed line in Juvenal, or an obscure verb in *Æschylus*, he soon became more amiable, and permitted me to enjoy my share of those good things which he obtained by the exercise of grave humbug and sanctimonious imposture. When my lord went to the university, some four years after our first meeting, nothing would please him but I must go also; and his father, Lord Mallandaine, being by this time deceased, and he succeeded to the title, with no one but a foolish, indulgent mother to govern him, he of course had his way, and I enjoyed the education of a gentleman at my patron's charge.

"I could tell you rare stories of those wild days, Mr. Ainsleigh, stories of exploits that redound rather to my cleverness than to my patron's morality or my own sense of honour. To sum up the whole, we were both expelled the university under circumstances of peculiar disgrace; and Lord Mallandaine, not caring to face a doting mother, proposed a continental tour, with me for his companion. Together we visited France, Italy, and the Low Countries, intrigued with Venetian courtesans, and gamed with Parisian dandies, got up cock-fights in the Colosseum at Rome, and sparring-matches in a Florentine palace, returned to England low in pocket and broken in health, discontented with each other and disgusted with the world. I happened fortunately to be master of more than one important secret of my patron's, and in consideration of this fact, rather than from any remnant of his early friendship for me, my lord presented me with a few hundreds, and bade me make my fortune at the Bar, for which profession, he was good enough to observe, my natural impudence and capacity for lying eminently adapted me. I thanked him in my politest manner, and cursing him in spirit, wished him good-day. Since then we have met rarely, and then only by accident, and my chief consolation whilst going to the dogs has been to know that he is treading the same road."

"That is scarcely a Christian sentiment," said I, "since, by your own showing, Lord Mallandaine was kind to you."

"Kind? yes! He kept me about him so long as I amused him, and kicked me off when he tired of me. You do not know—your simplicity cannot conceive—the things I have done for that man, the degradations to which I have submitted, the perils I have encountered. Believe me, Sganarelle's situation is no sinecure. And some day, in a brief fit of virtue, Don Juan turns away his faithful servant."

"How came you to succeed so ill at the Bar?"

"You will understand that better ten years hence. I began steadily enough, and for the first two years ate my dinners and studied with a pleader; but the habit of dissipation was too strong upon me. I took to spending my night in gaming-houses, and even worse places of entertainment, brought discreditable company to my chambers, got into ill-repute with the Benchers, and it ended by my being kicked out of the Temple, as I had been kicked off by my patron, and as I had been expelled from my college. You perceive I have a genius for getting turned out of doors."

"And since this time you have lived by literature?"

"I have lived by writing for the booksellers, if you call that literature: I don't. I have composed more biographies of lately defunct celebrities than I can count; have written a history of the Greek and Roman heroes, adapted for schools, and stolen from Plutarch; have composed metrical translations of such Latin poets as are least fit for publication; have invented a scandalous history of the Princess of Wales, whom I have no grounds for supposing anything but a very estimable matron; and have written pamphlets for and against every party. And now, sir, you know the worst of me. Upon my merits I have not presumed to touch; but even my enemies admit that I have an easy temper and a daring spirit, and that I can be a firm friend to the man who wins my regard. I have flung myself upon your charity, because I like your face; and it is for you to decide whether you will turn me out of doors, or allow me to remain as your faithful drudge and servitor until my luck turns, as it is sure to do in a week or two, when I will freely pay my share of our expenses, and continue truly grateful for your company."

And now came my fatal moment of weakness. I was but just twenty, and easily won to pity the misfortunes of my fellow-men, however well-deserved might be their woes. The man's story was in every manner calculated to prejudice me against him; but I reflected that this very fact told in his favour, and was at least evidence of his candour, since it would have been easy for so clever a rascal to give a plausible account

of himself. There seemed a reckless honesty about the fellow that fascinated me in spite of myself. How often had I felt the solitude of my chambers intolerable, and here was a learned and jovial companion eager to share them with me. True, that his character might be against him; but I had now begun the world, and must expect to encounter strange characters. And then, I doubt not that my vanity was tickled by his avowed fancy for me; and I suffered this adroit flattery to influence me in his favour. What chance has rustic youth against a citizen of the world such as this? The snare had been ingeniously prepared, and I walked blindfold into the meshes.

"I'll not turn you out of doors!" I cried heartily; "and if you possess the learning for which you give yourself credit, I shall be very glad of your company."

"Your hand on that," said Philip Hay; "and now that I am provided with a decent coat I'll go and look up Mr. Cave, and see if I can strike a bargain with him for my Amazons."

On this he departed, and was no sooner gone than I began to ponder seriously whether this Mr. Hay would ever return, and if I had not been cheated out of a substantial suit of clothes by this eloquent adventurer. I had been warned against the 'ricks of the town, and this might be one of them. I laughed aloud as I thought how easily I had been cheated.

In this matter, however, I was agreeably disappointed. At five o'clock in the afternoon in comes my gentleman, with his hat cocked on one side, and his face triumphant.

"Look you there, Mr. Robert Ainsleigh!" he cried, flinging a purse of guineas on the table. "Your clothes have brought me luck. Mr. Cave happened to be in rare good-humour to-day, and I have struck a very fair bargain for my history. There was a great hulking fellow, with a queer twitch of his face and limbs, hanging about the shop, who went near to spoil my market by the display of his learning. He cried out that the Amazons were fabulous females, and that I could know as much of them as I knew of Achilles—just what was told in Homer, and fragmentary snatches of the Cyclic poets. But I extinguished my twitching friend—who wore a coat that was patched at the elbows and ragged at the cuffs, showing at once premeditated poverty and natural slovenliness—and talked Cave into an affection for my Amazons. Here are ten guineas earnest-money, and by your leave, Mr. Ainsleigh, we'll spend a pleasant evening. Shall it be at Marylebone Gardens or Don Saltero's, Ranelagh or Vauxhall? Under which king, Bezonian?"

I would fain have avoided appearing in public with my new acquaintance, of whom I knew nothing that was not to his discredit; but his good-humour and oviality soon vanquished

my scruples. I had a natural curiosity about the pleasures of the town, those dazzling scenes of riot and delight which I had heard so praised by my fellow-students in the dining-hall—the places not to know which was to be in some manner behind the age. In a word, I suffered Mr. Philip Hay to lead me where he pleased; and those evenings which had hitherto been spent in the studious quiet of my chamber, or the grave gossip of an obscure coffee-house, were now given entirely to the pleasures of the town.

I might perhaps have continued to regard Philip Hay's assumed affection for myself with doubt and suspicion, if that reprobate individual had required anything from me. But his fortunes revived from the first day of our acquaintance, and he was more extravagant in his expenditure than myself, notwithstanding that my purse had been replenished by a bank-note enclosed in Lady Barbara's last letter. He reproached me loudly for my parsimony when I refused to drink or game in the vivacious company to which he introduced me at Vauxhall and other public places; and on more than one occasion, by his somewhat scornful offers to pay my score, drew me into an outlay which I afterwards regretted; for I never forgot that I owed all to my benefactress, and the natural pride of manhood was only sustained by the hope that I should one day be able to repay all.

Nor were my nights spent in noisy pleasure at Don Saltero's, or wasted in the Ranelagh Rotundo, unattended by the after-bitterness of remorse. From scenes so frivolous, from company so loose and unprincipled, my thoughts went back to Hauteville, the calm days and happy evenings, the pleasant conversations over my lady's tea-board, the summer sunsets Dorothea Hemmley and I had watched from the Italian garden, when the night-dews hung heavy on the roses, and the last of mid-summer's nightingales sang loud in the dusky distance of the wood. But, in spite of these better thoughts, the pleasures into which my companion plunged me were not without their charm. The restraint in which my boyhood had been spent especially fitted me to be the fool of such frivolous temptations: and my Mephistopheles contrived his snares with a rare genius. Seldom did he suffer weariness to mar my amusement. A skilful courtier, set on by wily ministers to lure a crown-prince from thoughts of statecraft into the vile slough of dissipation, could not have acted his part with greater care or wisdom. In a word, my tempter played upon me as Prince Hamlet bade the courtiers play upon "this pipe;" and it was only afterwards, when I saw the other side of his cards, that I knew the subtlety of his game, and how utterly helpless I had been in his hands.



I had enjoyed the privilege of Mr. Hay's society for six weeks before Sir Marcus Lestrangle and his family came to London. I had ventured to call more than once in St. James's Square, where the house-porter informed me that his master was suffering from an attack of gout, which detained him at Hauteville, and that Mr. Lestrangle was in Paris. I was relieved to hear of Everard's absence, and to know that Dora was for the present free from the attention, or persecution, of her enforced suitor.

We came through St. James's Square one night, after an evening spent at Vauxhall, whence it had pleased us to return on foot. I have since had reason to believe that Mr. Hay had his own special purpose in bringing me this way on this particular night. We had supped with some of his rackety acquaintance at the gardens, and he had induced me to drink a little more than usual. The punch, the company, and the long walk in the night-air had combined to excite my brain, and for the first time during our acquaintance I had spoken freely of my friends at Hauteville; nor did I perceive until afterwards, when considering my night's folly in the sober reflections of the next morning, how artfully my companion led me on to the revelation of my most secret thoughts.

The windows of Sir Marcus's house were blazing with the light of numberless candles as we came into the square. The family had arrived, and Lady Barbara was holding a reception. The great hall-door was open, and we saw the splendour within, with guests ascending and descending, and footmen bawling in the hall and on the staircase. Without there was a crowd of chair-men, footmen with flaring torches, link-boys, and lantern-bearers, though it was a fine spring night, and the stars shining high up in the clear cold gray. We stood to watch the company passing in and out, powder and diamonds, rustling trains of gorgeous hues, and gold and silver brocade, that flashed in the glare of the torches. The crowd proclaimed the names of beaux and belles, soldiers and statesmen. Now there was a hush and murmur in the crowd as Mr. Pelham descended from his chariot, with ribbon and star upon his breast, and a smile upon his florid countenance. How soon was that respected head to be laid low! And here, close behind him, came the Duke of Newcastle, looking right and left, with his glass held affectedly to his eye, challenging the plaudits of the crowd.

"What a grinning baboon goes yonder!" cried my companion, who knew every one; "it is a monkey that clammers into power on the shoulders of better men."

A thick-set, clumsy-looking man, with a dark scowling face, came presently through the crowd.

"Yonder goes the Secretary of War, Henry Fox," said Mr.

Hay; "one of the greatest statesmen we have, but not eloquent as a speaker. Did you ever see such a hang-dog countenance? One would say 'twas a fellow that had just committed a murder and hid the body in a ditch. But the man is a genius! If he and Pitt could but combine their forces, the brotherhood of Pelham must bow their diminished heads. Sir Marcus is well in with the Ministry, you see, and I doubt not will get some new berth abroad or at home. Why, with such interest, you ought to be in the House of Commons, instead of slaving for the reward of a shabby stuff gown, and the right to cross-examine witnesses for the Crown against a sheepstealer! But come away; it is sorry pleasure hanging about the door when we feel ourselves good enough for the best company in the drawing-room."

"I am not so sure of my own merits as you are of yours. Philip," I answered, laughing; "but there is one in that house I would give a great deal to see."

"And that one is Miss Dorothea Hemsley, a young lady with fifty thousand pounds for her fortune, who is engaged to her cousin, Everard Lestrangle, and who would marry you to-morrow if you had the courage of a mouse!" said my companion.

We had now drawn a little aloof from the crowd; Philip Hay had thrust his arm through mine, and was leading me home-wards.

"What do you mean?" I cried, aghast at such sacrilege as this light mention of a name that was, and has ever been, sacred to my ears.

"I mean that I am a man of the world, and know what stuff women are made of. You tell me that Miss Hemsley is plighted, or all but plighted, to young Lestrangle, as hardened a sinner as my late patron Mallandaine, from whom I have heard his character. And you have watched her, and seen her unhappy; and you surprised her once in tears; and she owned that the burden of her sorrow was hard to bear. Yet with all her sorrow she found time and patience to teach you Spanish, and was pleased you should polish her Italian; and sang with you, and walked with you, and watched with a face white as a corpse while Sir Marcus reviled and banished you, and sent you a little pious monkish book for your comfort. Why, man alive, the woman loves you—'tis plain as the nose on your face—and would marry you out of hand if you had the spirit to ask her."

"That is impossible—even if I could do such an act of dishonour against Lady Barbara, which I could not. Those who have authority over her would take care to prevent such a marriage."

"Yes if you were so dull a blockhead as to ask their permission. But I don't suppose even your rustic simplicity is simple enough for that. There are parsons by the score in May Fair

and the Fleet who will marry you without leave or license from parents and guardians; and you will surely not let the young lady be sacrificed to a man she hates for lack of a little courage on your part?"

"If daring of mine could secure her happiness, there are few perils I would not dare," I answered boldly.

"Pshaw! thou art a creature of ifs and buts. Had I such good fortune as to win the heart of an orphan heiress, I would not stand shivering on the door-step while my lady-love was pining for me within."

The cold night and the walk had sobered me by this time, and the man's tone offended me. I begged him to trouble himself no more about my business, which I assured him I could conduct without his advice. He received my rebuff with his usual good-humour, and for some time forbore to offend by any mention of Dora's name.

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## CHAPTER XL

### WE FLIGHT OUR TROTH.

ON the following day I received a note from Lady Barbara. It had been written before the assembly of the previous night, and it informed me that the writer would walk in the Mall in St. James's Park at three o'clock the next afternoon, attended only by a footman, and would be pleased if I could join her there, as if by accident.

Philip Hay was present when I received this letter, and soon after proposed an expedition that would occupy the afternoon and evening. When I declined this he questioned me so closely that I confessed I was going to meet my patroness. He congratulated me on being so high in her favour, and went out upon his own business.

My heart beat high as I entered the Mall. If Dora should be with Lady Barbara!—if!—but I knew this could not be. My lady herself had been anxious to banish me from that sweet society, and would she again expose me to the danger which had already well-nigh wrecked my peace? No; I felt sure my benefactress would be alone; and yet it was with a pang of disappointment I saw her solitary figure approach me.

It was not the fashionable hour for promenaders, and except for an occasional passer, or a strolling nurse-girl with her brood of children, we had the walk well-nigh to ourselves.

Lady Barbara dismissed her footman, bidding him return for her in half an hour. She led the way to a retired seat under

one of the newly-budding elms, and here we sat side by side, my lady for a few moments silent with emotion, and I no less deeply moved.

Presently she took my hand and kissed it.

"Dear Robert! dear adopted son!" she murmured gently, "it is hard to meet you thus by stealth."

"Nothing is hard to me, dear madam, except the loss of your affection."

"And that loss can never happen to you. I have only to look in your face, and the past comes back to me, and I fancy you are your father, and I am young, and jealous, and wicked, and miserable once more. No justice that I can do to you will atone for that old wrong to him. Oh, if it could! But this is a vain wish; a wrong done to the dead is done for ever. How well you look! how manly you have grown! You had never much of the rustic air, but even that you had is gone, and you are a courtier, a man of the world. In what school have you been graduating?"

"I blushed as I bethought myself that it was in those notorious seminaries of Ranelagh and Vauxhall I had acquired the manly air on which my dear lady was pleased to congratulate me.

"Speak to me of yourself, dear madam," I said, "and of—"

"And of Dora!" said Lady Barbara, as I paused confused. "Ah, Robert, that is a business which sorely troubles me."

"What business, madam?"

"Dora's marriage with Everard. As the time draws near I begin to doubt the wisdom of my husband's conduct in this matter."

"As the time draws near!" I cried, my heart beating painfully. "What do you mean by those words, madam?"

"Ah, I forgot! You know nothing of what has happened since you left Hauteville. Sir Marcus has hurried on this marriage between his niece and his son. I fear he has pressed his suit somewhat too persistently. The dear child yields, but I am sure she is unhappy; and oh! Robert, I sorely fear it is for her fortune Everard is so eager."

"I know as much, Lady Barbara," replied I, and proceeded to repeat the remarks on this subject with which Mr. Everard had favoured me. "No man who loved a woman would speak of her thus," I said in conclusion.

On this my lady became very thoughtful.

"Oh, Robert, would to Heaven I knew what is best to be done!" she cried after a pause.

"Anything is better than that Miss Hemsley should be unhappy," said I; "and I do not believe *that* marriage can result in

her happiness. Oh, madam, believe me, this is no selfish argument! It is not because I love her that I say this. Alas! what hope have I? Sever her from Everard Lestrangle to-morrow, and she is no nearer me. But why should her peace be sacrificed to any ambitious design of her guardian's?

"It was her father's wish also, Robert. Mr. Hemsley was a rich city merchant, who owed his position in society to his alliance with the Lestranges. He had a great friendship for my husband, and it was he who first mooted the idea of Dorothea's union with her cousin. His will was made with a view to this; and if Dora marries without her guardian's consent, she forfeits half of her fifty thousand pounds, which sum goes to Sir Marcus."

I was inexpressibly glad to hear this; it seemed to lessen by one-half the distance between the heiress and me.

"Ah, madam, how happy the lover who should win her against her uncle's will!" cried I.

"Even then she would have no despicable fortune. The stringent terms of Mr. Hemsley's will are by no means singular in days when clandestine marriages are so common, and an heiress the mark for every adventurer. There is some talk of a bill to stop Fleet marriages; but they say Henry Fox will oppose it with all his might, since he owes his happiness to a stolen match."

"You spoke of Miss Hemsley's marriage as near at hand, madam. When is it to be?"

I faltered, and found myself cowering like one who awaits his death-blow.

"Alas! Robert, very soon; in a few weeks."

"That is indeed soon. But surely, madam, if this young lady does not love her cousin, you will interfere to prevent her misery? If Sir Marcus be the guardian of her fortune, you are as surely the proper guardian of her peace; you cannot consent to see her sacrificed."

"I know not what I ought to do, Robert," replied my lady, helplessly. "I wish I better knew the dear girl's heart, and yet I dare not question her. I have tried my uttermost to dissuade Sir Marcus from this hasty marriage, but he is inflexible. And Dora is *his* niece and ward, not mine. Everard is in Paris, where he is appointed Secretary of Legation; but he comes back to-morrow night. He is on the road at this moment, and the preparations for the wedding are already begun. The milliners are busy with the bride's finery; but the poor child takes no pleasure in laces and brocades. I remember the fuss about my own wedding-clothes, and what weary work it all seemed to me. Ah, Robert, these loveless, joyless marriages must surely be displeasing to Heaven. But I see my servant coming back to us.

You must go, dear; I shall write to you soon. Good-bye, and God bless you!"

So we parted; I to return to the Temple, sorely depressed in spirits. Nor were Mr. Hay's persuasions of any avail with me for some time after this. The very thought of crowded public gardens filled me with aversion; I sickened at my comrade's boisterous jokes; I buried myself in my books, and would have given much to be rid of this old man of the mountain, who had contrived to fasten himself upon my shoulders. I think Mr. Hay's tact enabled him to perceive this, for he left me to myself for upwards of a week soon afterwards, absenting himself upon his own business, as he said.

Days and weeks passed, and brought me no letter from Lady Barbara. I suffered tortures of anxiety, and every evening after dark stole away from my books and walked to St. James's Square, where, under cover of the friendly night, I reconnoitred the mansion that sheltered Dorothea Hemsley. The lighted windows, more or less brilliantly illuminated, told me nothing of her who was perhaps sad and sorrowful within. Sometimes the thought that she was being forced into a hateful marriage went nigh to drive me to desperation. I remembered what Philip Hay—that soldier of fortune and citizen of the world—had said to me. The great doors of the diplomatist's house stood open before me. Why should I not rush in and rescue my darling from her oppressors by force of arms—my own strong arms, which should be able to shield and save her from all the world. Why should I not do this? Why, indeed, except that I had no right to suppose such a proceeding would be agreeable to Miss Hemsley. Could I have been assured of her love, there would have been little need of hesitation. But how was I, the least learned of students in the science of woman's heart, to interpret, with any certainty, tender looks, and gentle blushes, and downcast eyelids, and faint fluttering hand, and low tremulous voice? Those sweet signs of maiden bashfulness might mean so little—or so much.

One night that I found the house in St. James's Square dimly lighted, and the porter standing at the open door tasting the evening air, I made so bold as to ask that functionary whether there was not soon to be a marriage in the family he served. The man had not been at Hauteville, being no doubt too burly and ponderous a person for removal from his leather-hooded chair in London, and I therefore ran no hazard of recognition.

Yes; he informed me that on Thursday fortnight the young lady of the house was to be married. The blow struck hard. Thursday fortnight! It was now Tuesday; in sixteen days Dora would be gone from me for ever.

I returned to my chambers with a distracted mind, but happily found a brief note from Lady Barbara awaiting me.

"We shall be at Vauxhall to-morrow evening," she wrote; "be sure to be at ten o'clock in the dark walk to the right of the statue of Neptune,—and be cautious. We shall not be alone."

"We." Did "we" mean my Lady and Miss Hemsley? I thought as much; and I know not how I lived till the next night. Philip Hay's presence and lively interest in my welfare seemed at this time particularly obtrusive. He questioned me closely as to where I was going to spend my evening, and said he had made a special appointment for me with some friends of his own at Vauxhall.

I doubt not that some movement of vexation at this intelligence betrayed where I was going, if he had not the knowledge already from another source.

Evening came, and I found myself for the first time alone in the gardens, fluttered with unspeakable hopes, and very anxious to avoid any encounter with Mr. Philip Hay. Though I had meant to arrive only a few minutes before the hour named by Lady Barbara, it was but nine o'clock when I entered the gates, so swiftly did my desires outrun time. I kept entirely to the dark walks, and looked at my watch every time I came to a solitary lamp. Every footstep fluttered me, every rustle of brocade set my heart beating with a sudden tumult. I thought the gardens could never have been so full of fops and belles, the dark alleys never so affected by the company.

At last the clock struck ten; the distant music grew confused in my ears, placid stars above and lamps below swam before my eyes. Two ladies in hoods and masks approached, and in another moment Dora was at my side.

"Dora—Miss Hemsley!" I faltered; and then I know not what impulse possessed me, but, forgetful of all except the delight of this meeting, I clasped the dear girl in my arms. "My love, my darling!" I cried, "this hateful marriage must not be."

"No, Robert," she murmured, gently withdrawing herself from my embrace, "it shall not be. I have been very weak and cowardly, but when the time drew near, despair made me bold, and I cast myself upon Lady Barbara's mercy. Dearest aunt! she is all goodness, and she will not suffer me to be wretched for life, as I should be if I married one I cannot love, whom I cannot even respect."

"Yes, Robert," said my lady, "we must save this dear girl. I knew not her heart till the night before last, when some tearful words she let fall tempted me to question her. We must save her—but how? I cannot openly oppose the will of her guardian, my husband; and I know nothing against my stepson. It is a faithful lover must save her, Robert."

My lady and Dora had both removed their masks. The sweet girl stood before me, one moment pale as a lily, and in the next blushing crimson.

"There is one, madam, who would shrink from no dangerous service if he might be permitted to save her, and who would take her for his wife penniless more proudly than as heiress to a great fortune. But he is obscure, dependent, almost nameless. Would you not despise such an one, Dora?"

"Despise you!" faltered my angel tenderly; and she gave me a divine look from her blue eyes.

"I begin to think I am not wanted here," cried my lady, laughing; "I will go and pay my respects to Neptune.—Ah, Dora, will you hang your pearl necklace on the sea-god's trident if you escape shipwreck on life's troubled ocean?"

She was gone. I led my darling to a bench, and we sat down side by side. She put on her mask again; was it to hide those maiden blushes? And then, emboldened by sudden joy, I spoke to her of my love, and implored her to consent to a speedy clandestine marriage.

"I would not offer you a name so obscure, Dora," said I, when I had pleaded in swift passionate words, that came from the very depth of my heart; "I would rather wait and work patiently till I was worthier so dear a partner. But by this way only, or by a resolute refusal on your part, which would expose you to all the tortures of domestic persecution, can your union with Everard Lestrang be avoided; and oh, my darling, I think I would sooner see you dead than united to that man, for I know he is a villain. Who else should have forged that vile letter that banished and disgraced me? Who else should be privy to poor Margaret's flight? Ah, Dora, *you* know how little of my time was spent at the warrener's lodge after one dear person came to Hauteville. I was but too forgetful of my old humble friends. Now, darling, you must not marry Everard Lestrang. But can you consent to share a lot so lowly as mine?"

"Yes, Robert," she whispered; and for a few blessed moments we sat silent, with clasped hands. This was our betrothal.

A faint rustling of the bushes behind startled us. I sprang to my feet.

"Who is there?" I cried, with my hand on my sword-hilt, for I was inclined to suspect an eavesdropper.

Again I heard a stealthy rustling, and swift footsteps in the next walk. I examined the hedge, which grew thick and high; but the listener, if there had been one, was gone. Those rapid retreating footsteps were his, no doubt.

Lady Barbara came hurrying towards us.



"Come, children," she cried, "is all settled?"

"There is nothing settled, dear madam, except that Miss Hemsley has blessed a most unworthy creature with her love."

"Oh, Robert, if I can read you aright, she will have no cause to repent her confidence. Dear children! But there is not time for another word. We are here with a party, you know, Robert, and have stolen away from them. Our friends will be looking for us. Am I to arrange everything? Yes, I suppose mine is the only cool head among us. I will write to you, Robert."

"Lady Barbara!" called a gentleman, running towards us.

"See, here comes Mr. Dolford, one of our beaux. Away with you, cousin, away!"

I pressed Dora's hand, murmured a blessing upon my cousin and my love, and vanished as my lady's cavalier approached her, complaining bitterly of her absence.

"We have all been hunting you, ladies. Delavanti, the conjuror, is just beginning his wonderful performance. It is the best thing to be seen this year, and I would not have you miss it.—Lestranger has been positively distracted, I protest, Miss Hemsley."

I felt like a creature in a dream after leaving Dora. My head swam with the sweet intoxication of so much happiness. I could not tear myself from the garden, but hung about the darker walks in the faint hope of seeing her again. It was not till after midnight that I left the pleasure-haunt and walked eastwards under the pale April stars.

## CHAPTER XII.

### I AM TRAPPED BY A TRAITOR.

AFTER that too happy meeting at Vauxhall my spirits were too much distracted for the common business of life, and I found the society of Mr. Hay far from agreeable. I longed to be alone with my hopes and anxieties, but knew not how to get rid of a companion who cost me nothing, and took pains to make himself useful and necessary to me. In telling him what I had told him of my secrets, I had given him some right to be interested in my affairs, and this privilege he used with much freedom, and to my extreme annoyance, until I lost my temper one day, and informed him that I preferred to manage my own business without his advice or interference.

If I had hoped to rid myself of him by this means, I was doomed to disappointment. Mr. Hay was blessed with an

imperturbable temper, and an easy impudence not to be disconcerted by any rebuff.

"That's wrong, Bob," he replied; "the advice of a man of the world is always worth having; and I'll wager I could help you to a wife and a fortune if you'd let me."

"I have no doubt of your genius for intrigue," I answered coldly; "but how is it you have not found those blessings for yourself?"

"How do you know that I have not had and lost them. A man of my stamp runs through a fortune, and quarrels and parts company from a wife, while a fellow of your icy nature is deliberating a love-letter."

During this period of anxious expectation I found it impossible to rid myself of my companion's observation. If I went out after dark to watch the house that held my treasure, as I did every evening, he guessed my errand, and upbraided me for my pusillanimity. I tried to quarrel with him; but, as it did not suit the gentleman's purpose that we should part, I found this impossible.

It was a week after my meeting with Dora, and it seemed an age, when a visitor came to my chambers, and the door being opened by Mr. Hay, that person appeared before me in high spirits, to announce that a young woman wanted to speak to me.

"She is dressed like a milliner's girl or a lady's-maid," he said; "but I'll wager it is thy innamorata in disguise."

I flew to the door, and found Miss Hemsley's maid, a young Frenchwoman, whom I had seen often at Hauteville, and who was no especial favourite of mine. She had a pinched, sallow countenance, with small piercing black eyes. She spoke English very tolerably, but with an unpleasant nasal twang, and I had heard Lady Barbara extol her as a model of industry and fidelity. I felt, therefore, that my own dislike of the girl was an unworthy prejudice of the masculine mind, which is ever apt to associate an unpleasing face with an inferior nature. To-day I could have hugged Ma'amselle Adolphine, so delighted was I to welcome any one who brought me tidings of Dora. I led her into my sitting-room, where Mr. Hay was lounging over a newspaper.

"As this young woman has come to speak of private business, I should be very glad to have the room to ourselves for half an hour, Hay," said I.

"With all my heart, Bob; I can read the news at a coffee-house as well as here.—Your servant, madam."

Mr. Hay saluted my visitor with a profound bow, and favoured her with a significant glance which I at the moment took for a simple fashionable leer, much affected at a time when your spurious fine gentleman's language to women was always spiced

with double meaning, and his every look a declaration. I saw Mr. Hay safe outside my door, and then turned eagerly to the Frenchwoman.

"Now, Adolphine, what news from your mistress?" I cried. "Have you brought me a letter?"

"Ah, mais, but no, monsieur!" shrieked the girl; "mademoiselle is too well watch for that. She cannot run the hazard of to write. It is nothing but drums, and dinners, and masquerades, and picture-sales, and parties to Ranelagh all the day and all the night, and he, Monsieur Everard, is alway there—a'way upon her steps. Mais, but it is my Lady Barbara who send me to-day. The marriage that you know of is to take place at once, at the Fleet, at May Fair, anywhere that they will ask no question. And if you have a friend who can help you to arrange the things, my Lady Barbara says—ah, let me not forget what it is she has said—since you know not the town, you are to confide in your friend, *pourvu* that you can trust yourself to him."

A friend? What friend had I? There was my companion, Mr. Philip Hay, clever, unscrupulous, practised in intrigue, and only too eager to be useful. But could I venture to confide my happiness to him?

"What next, Adolphine?" I cried.

"The marriages must be immediatement, see you, Monsieur Robert. This day week is fix for the wedding wid Monsieur Everard. To-night there is a masquerade at Ranelagh. Mademoiselle will be there, with my Lady Barbara and Monsieur Everard. At half-past twelve o'clock, when the rooms are most crowd, she will complain of the heat, and will retire to the cloak-room wid her aunt, where she will slip a black silk domine over her dress and will come out to the portico, alway wid her aunt. You must be upon the spot wid a hackney coach ready to carry her away. It must all be done quick like the lightning, for Monsieur Everard will not be slow to take alarm; and then you will drive at once to your parson, and he will marry you *sur-le-champ*. And after, you had best to leave the country with your bride, says my Lady Barbara, if you would not have the blood shed between you and Monsieur Everard."

"I can protect my wife and my honour in England, or elsewhere," I answered proudly; and then with a throbbing heart I sat down to write to my dear girl, assuring her of my gratitude and love, and thanking her a thousand times for her confidence; a long, wild, rambling epistle, I doubt not. I had not time to read it over, for the Frenchwoman was in haste to be gone, so I crammed the letter and a couple of guineas into her hand and dismissed her.

When she was gone I paced my chamber thoughtfully for

some time, debating the prudence of confiding in Philip Hay. After serious reflection I decided in his favour. True that I knew him to be a rascal, yet if well paid for his fidelity he would surely be faithful. And what interest could he have in betraying me? Some help in this matter I must assuredly have. I knew nothing of Fleet marriages or the law relating to them; and there was no time for me to obtain such knowledge from strangers. I had often enough been hustled in Holborn and on Ludgate Hill by low wretches touting for those reprobate parsons who made a living by such clandestine unions; but I could at least trust Philip Hay rather than one of these vulgar adventurers. To arrange a marriage between midnight and sunrise might be, nay, no doubt would be, a matter of some difficulty, and for this I needed just such help as my companion could give me; while, in the event of any pursuit on the part of Everard Lestrangle, the assistance of such a sturdy henchman would be of no small service. It was already late in the afternoon, and there was little time for indecision, so I determined on trusting Mr. Hay with this precious secret, and on his return hastened to make him my confidant.

"It is just such an adventure as I love!" he cried gaily. "Leave all to me, and I will engage that the soberest parson in the purlieus of the Fleet prison shall be in waiting with book and gown to unite you to your heiress at the unearthly hour of one to-morrow morning. He will ask an extra fee for the unusual hour, though it is scarcely so uncommon as you may think; but of course you'll not object to that."

"And will such a marriage be strictly legal?" I asked.

"Faith yes, Bob; the Gordian knot shall be as tight as if an archbishop had the tying of it—unless, indeed, you give special notice to the parson beforehand, when these ecclesiastics have a way of forgetting to read some essential bit of the service, which omission enables Signor Sposo to bid Signora Sposa good-morning some fine day when she grows troublesome. Oh, they are rare obliging fellows, I assure you, these parsons; but though these marriages are legal enough, it is a felony on their part to perform them, for which they are liable to prosecution. But they snap their fingers at Mr. Justice, and contrive to live a jolly life. There was Dr. Gainham, for instance, playfully entitled Bishop of Hell, a rare impudent dog; and the famous Keith, who made a handsome fortune by his chapel in May Fair; and when there was some talk of his brother ecclesiastics putting down his traffic, vowed if they did he would buy a piece of ground and outbury them."

While my companion rattled on thus, I was meditating my plans for the night. Yes, Lady Barbara was right. It would be best to carry my bride from England, and place her where

she would be safe from Everard Lestrangle's persecution. I could come back to my native shores to fight him, if my honour should demand such an act; but my first thought must be of Dora.

I had luckily upwards of a hundred pounds in hand; and this, after seeing Mr. Hay with a twenty-pound note, would leave me plenty for a journey to France, and a month or two's living in some pleasant rustic retreat, which Dora, who knew the Continent, should choose. "And I will be her slave and lie at her feet, during the brief happy holiday of our honeymoon," I thought; and then I will come back to London and work for a position at the Bar, and redeem my name from the stigma of the fortune-hunter, and every penny of the income from her five-and-twenty thousand pounds shall be spent on herself, so that she may forget she is married to a poor man."

My fancy flew to a pretty rural cottage I had seen to let in one of the lanes beyond Kensington, during a recent ramble in that quarter, and which I imagined just such a simple paradise as my love would like.

"I will send Hay to secure it to-morrow," I said to myself, "while Dora and I are posting towards Dover, and I will ask Lady Barbara to furnish it for us.

Mr. Hay departed in search of a sober parson, and to order the post-horses and chariot to convey us to Dover; while I busied myself with the packing of a trunk to take with me on my journey. Never had I been so particular about my toilette. I deliberated solemnly between a blue suit and a chocolate one, and no elegant trifle of Pall Mall could have been more particular than I in my selection of cravat and ruffles.

By the time I had made my arrangements and counted my money, Mr. Hay returned. He had settled everything most pleasantly—found an exemplary parson, a real Oxford man, without a fault, except a capacity for losing money at faro, at the tavern of the "Two Sawyers," Fleet Lane. The chaise and horses were ordered, and would be in waiting close to this place of entertainment.

"And by to-morrow noon you will be in Dover," said my coadjutor, "in time for the packet that sails at four in the afternoon, wind and weather permitting. And now let us go and dine together. What, man alive!" he cried, in answer to a dissentient look of mine, "will you refuse to crack a bottle with a faithful friend at parting? By —, Mr. Bob, unless I am used as a friend I will have no hand in this business. I am no dirty tool, too base to touch, but not too vile to use!"

"It was no want of friendship that made me hesitate, Phil," I replied; "but I am in too anxious a mood for pleasure, and

shall be poor company. We'll have a bottle together, notwithstanding."

I looked at my watch, a bulky Tompion with a clumsy outer case of leather, that had belonged to my grandfather the colonel, and had been flung aside as old-fashioned by my father when he went to Cambridge, and left in a drawer at Hauteville, where Lady Barbara found it, and gave it to me. It was early yet, and indeed, but for Mr. Hay's invitation to dine, I know not how I should have got rid of the hours that must pass before my appointment at Ranelagh.

My officious friend took me to a tavern that was strange to me, a house in Chelsea, where he ordered an excellent dinner, and so much wine that I remonstrated with him for his folly. But he informed me that we were not going to dine alone, and presently arrived a person of military aspect, in a uniform which I had never seen before, whom Mr. Hay introduced as Sergeant O'Blagg of the East India Company's service, a gentleman who thought no more of storming a Mahratta fortress than of cracking a bottle of burgundy, and who stood high in the estimation of Major Lawrence.

This brave warrior, whose Hibernian accent was in nowise modified by long service in the East, favoured us during dinner with many wonderful stories of his adventures in those distant lands, and dilated with a somewhat florid eloquence upon the wealth and glory to be won there.

"You gentlemen who know no more of war than those petty European skirmishes about which you kick up such a row, with firing of big guns and ringing of big bells, bedad, for a victory that you're neither better nor worse for, except in the matter of a new tax on our boots, or your wig, or your tay, ye've no notion of our conquests out yonder, where, at the sack of a town, there's diamonds as big as beans to be picked up in the streets, and the pearls fly as thick as hailstones about our soldiers' heads; and there's big brazen idols in the temples with their stomachs full of rubies and emeralds and such like, just as you stuff a Michaelmas goose, sir, and him as splits the haythen image asunder with the butt-end of his gun gets the stuffing for his pains. Why, the Great Mogul has seven golden thrones—or maybe some of 'em's silver—covered with jewels"—the sergeant called them "jooks"—"every one of 'em handsomer than t'other, except the one that's called the paycock throne, and that whops the lot, and is valued at forty millions of rupays."

So he ran on, to the apparent delight of my companion, but to my own unutterable weariness. What were the jewelled thrones of the Great Mogul to me, who knew but one treasure, and sighed but for one dear prize? The sergeant's company

vexed me; but Philip Hay explained to me in an undertone that he had met this old friend by accident in the street, and could not well avoid asking him to join us at dinner. I observed that the soldier drank ferociously, and both he and Hay pressed the wine on me; but this kindness I for some time resolutely declined. I would have given much to have been away from these boisterous boon-companions, and heartily repented my confidence in Mr. Hay, which had placed me in such an unwelcome position.

I gave but little attention to the sergeant's stories, which he told in a noisy, uproarious manner peculiar to the lower orders of his countrymen, and garnished with military oaths. My thoughts were far away from that boisterous table. When the bottle was pushed towards me, with clamorous protestations against my abstinence, I filled my glass mechanically, and in this manner, when the night grew late, I drank some three or four glasses of a claret which seemed to me a thin, poor wine, ill-adapted to steal a man's brains. Yet by ten o'clock I felt a kind of stupor creeping over me—a confusion of the brain, in which the strident voice of the Irish soldier roaring his braggart stories of Indian conquest and loot, of Dupleix and the Great Mogul, peacock thrones, and royal elephants in jewelled harness, seemed strange and distant to my ears.

In this condition of my mind I was perpetually troubled by the idea that I had no right to be here. It was in vain that I looked at my watch, which showed me that I had nearly three hours to wait before my presence would be required at the gates of Ranelagh. At last I started up from the table in haste, telling Philip Hay that I could stay no longer, and if he was not ready to accompany me, would go alone.

He pointed to an eight-day clock in a corner of the room.

"Art thou mad, Bob?" he cried; "it has not yet gone the half-hour after ten. Drink a glass of this rare old Hollands, and take things easy."

He forced a glass of spirit upon me, which I drank unwillingly enough. It had a strange burning taste, and I had reason afterwards to know that it was no such simple liquor as Hollands I was thus made to drink, but a dram doctored with an Indian spirit that maddens the brain.

"We can get rid of the sergeant in half an hour, and then go out and get our hackney coach," whispered Hay close in my ear. "There is no need for him to know our business."

I acknowledged the wisdom of this, and tried to listen with some degree of patience to the soldier's long-winded stories, and my friend's comments upon them; but before I had listened long, the voices of the two mingled confusedly, then grew into a buzzing sound, and at last died away into a low murmur, like the

pleasant rustling of trees on a summer afternoon, as my head sank forward on the table, and I slept.

I was awakened suddenly by a violent slap on the shoulder, and a loud voice crying,—

"Twelve o'clock, Bob; the landlord is shutting his doors, and 'tis time we went in search of our coach. Why, what a dull companion thou hast been!"

I staggered to my feet. My eyeballs burnt, and my head ached to splitting; for a moment I scarce remembered where I was, or the events of the day.

"Heavens, I have slept!" I exclaimed at last; "and Dora waiting for me, perhaps. Why, in perdition's name, did you make me drink?"

"You must have the weakest head in Christendom, child, if three glasses of French wine can muddle it. Come, the reckoning is paid, and a long one, for that Irishman drinks like a fish; we can settle between us by-and-by. *Allons!*"

He slipped his arm through mine, and led me from the house. The feeble street-lamps swam before my eyes, and I could hardly have walked without my companion's support. Not far from the tavern we found a hackney-coach that had just brought a family party from the theatre, and this carried us at a good pace to Ranelagh, before the doors of which pleasure-place we alighted.

Here all was confusion and riot—torches blazing, chair-men bawling, footmen squabbling, ducal chariots stopping the way, and a crowd of finely-dressed people going in and out of the lighted doors.

My companion held me tightly by the arm, and it was as much as we could do to keep our places in the crowd. Standing thus, hustled and pushed on every side, we waited for a time that seemed to me very long, but no black-robed mask approached us. Maskers in red and blue and yellow, Great Moguls and Turkish princesses, shepherds and shepherdesses, sailors, sultans, chimney-sweeps, harlequins, Punchinellos, Sir John Falstaffs, and Abel Druggers, passed and pushed us, but she for whom I waited with throbbing heart and burning brain did not appear.

At last I felt myself tapped on the shoulder by some one amongst the crowd behind us, and turning, found myself face to face with two women in black dominoes and masks. One removed her mask instantly, and I recognized Mademoiselle Adolphine.

"Get us to a coach as quick as you can, Mr. Robert," she entreated hurriedly; "my young lady is like to swoon herself.—Oh, but I pray you to sustain yourself, mademoiselle! The coach is all near, and monsieur will lead us there. Lean you on his arm, mademoiselle, and on me.—And you will tell the coachman where



to drive, and follow us in another coach, is it not, monsieur? Ah, what of dangers, what of hazards we have run to rencounter you! Monsieur Lestrangle is yonder in waiting for mademoiselle, who has gone away with her aunt to the cloak-room; and Miladi Barbara goes to monsieur to say that mademoiselle is too ill to return to the dance. Word of honour, it is a pretty comedy!" and chattering thus, the French maid hurried and bustled us to the door of a coach, into which she pushed her timid companion, who did indeed seem half-fainting.

I pressed the poor little trembling hand, which clung convulsively to mine.

"Shall I not come with you, Dora?" I asked.

"Great Heaven, no!" the French girl shrieked almost hysterically; "and if one pursues us, and Monsieur Lestrangle came to overtake us,—the beautiful affair! Go you into the other coach, monsieur, with your friend, and tell to our coachman to follow yours. Go, then. Is there the time to lose in follies?" cried Adolphine, as I kissed the little hand that still clung to mine, alas! with but too natural fear.

Philip Hay pulled me from the carriage-door, directed the man where to drive, and thrust me into our coach before I had time to remonstrate.

"Drive like ten thousand devils!" he shouted to our Jarvey, who, no doubt used to such clandestine errands and the double or treble pay attendant on them, whipped his jaded horses into a gallop, and in another minute we were tearing, rattling, jolting eastwards at a pace that shook every bone in our bodies, and precluded any attempt at conversation.

I looked out of the window several times on the journey, to satisfy myself that the other coach was following. I think we could scarce have left Ranelagh an hour when we pulled up in a wretched dirty lane, before the dreary entrance of a tavern, whose dinginess was but just made visible by an oil-lamp hanging over the threshold.

"Is this the house?" I asked with a shudder. "What a horrid place!"

"Zounds, Bob, what a fool thou art! Does it matter by what gate a man goes to heaven! Quick, man; here are the ladies; there is no time for dawdling. My parson will be drunk or asleep if we're not quick; 'tis an hour after our time.—This way, mademoiselle; support your mistress. The stairs are somewhat rotten, and might be cleaner.—The chapel is an ugly one, miss; but this dirty stair is like Jacob's ladder, for here are seen angels ascending and descending.—Come, Bob."

He opened a door and ushered us into a chamber lighted with two tallow-candles in brass candlesticks. These stood on a table covered with a dirty cloth, and surmounted by a greasy, dilapi-

dated-looking prayer-book, upon the cover of which, in tarnished gilding, appeared the arms of one of the colleges. A man dressed in a grimy surplice, and with a red cotton handkerchief tied round his head in lieu of a wig, was nodding half asleep over an empty bottle; but he was broad awake in a moment at our entrance, saluted as briskly, clapped himself behind the table, opened his book, and began to gabble the marriage-service, as if for a wager.

The irreverence of the whole affair shocked me inexpressibly. Was this, save one, the most solemn of all ceremonials, to be thus rattled over by a drunkard?

"Stop, sir!" I cried; "let the lady at least remove her mask."

"*Mais tu es bête!*" roared Philip Hay. "*Veux-tu que tout le monde sache demain ce qui se fait ici ce soir?*" The lady will keep her mask; 'tis the custom with people of her rank.—Go on, parson, and let us have none of your clippings of the service. This is a *bonâ-fide* marriage, remember, but you'll be paid as well as if we wanted to play fast and loose by-and-by."

I took the little hand in mine. It trembled no longer, but was now icy cold. The parson rattled on with the service. Mr. Hay stood grinning at us, with his arms akimbo and his hat on. The bride's responses were given in a faint murmur that was almost a sob. The ring was slipped upon the slender finger, and the ceremonial being concluded, a greasy book was produced, in which I signed my name, and the bride after me. As she took the pen, Mr. Hay gave a loud huzza, which withdrew my attention from the register. It seemed the signal for a fresh arrival. The door of an inner room opened, and a gentleman entered, who took off his hat and saluted me with a bow of mock ceremony. This new-comer was Everard Lestrangle. His ironical courtesy, and the sardonic grin upon his hated face, told me that I was undone. Till this moment my brain had been dazed and muddled by the stuff that had been mixed with my drink; but my enemy's presence sobered me.

"Let me be first to salute the bride," exclaimed my lady's stepson. "You may remove your mask now, Mistress Ainsleigh, and let your husband imprint a hymeneal kiss upon the prettiest lips in Christendom."

She, my wife,—bound to me irrevocably by the ceremonial just gabbled over by a half-drunken parson,—took her mask from her face, and looked at me pleadingly, piteously, tenderly, with her soft brown eyes.

It was my foster-sister, Margery Hawker!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## I BEGIN MY APPRENTICESHIP.

"WHAT devil's work is this?" I cried, drawing my sword and looking towards Everard Lestrangle, who stood at some distance from me, and very close to the door, as if anxious to secure a convenient retreat.

"Oh, Robin, they told me 'twas your wish to marry me!"

"And the desperado draws his sword on the prettiest girl in Berks!" exclaimed Everard Lestrangle; "was there ever such a savage?"

"It is upon you that I draw my sword, liar and traitor." I gasped. "Your life or mine shall answer for this night's work."

"I decline to cross swords with a——"

Before the foul word could pass his lips, I sprang towards him with uplifted hand, and should have struck him across the face with my open palm, but for Philip Hay and the parson, who clutched at my arm, and held me off by their united strength.

"What a fire-eater this foundling of my lady's is!" cried Mr. Lestrangle with his languid sneer. "But why all this outcry? The wife we have given you is young and pretty, and 'twould only have served you right if we had tied you to some wrinkled harridan of the town. True, 'tis not the lady to whose hand and fortune your insolence aspired; but it is scarce six months since you swore you were ready to marry this one at a moment's notice, if her father could find her for you."

"I offered to marry an honest woman," I answered, "not your cast-off mistress."

My foster-sister sank to my feet with a stifled groan. God help us both! I had but hit the mark too well.

"No; 'twas my other mistress you wanted, with twenty-five thousand pounds for her fortune. You were welcome to my mistress—when I had done with her."

"Devil! will you fight me in this room—this moment?" I cried huskily.

"No! I will fight you neither here nor elsewhere, neither now nor at any future time, for a reason which I hinted just now, and which you need not force me to state more broadly. You are no mark for a gentleman's weapon.—Hold the fellow tight, Phil Hay; I have but a few words to say, and am gone."

"Let me go, Hay!" cried I; "why do you obey that scoundrel?"

"Because he is paid to obey me, as ma'amselle yonder has been paid for her part in the comedy. Do you suppose a man

of the world like myself was to be ousted and cheated by your bumpkinship, without trying to turn the tables on you? I saw how you were playing your cards from the day we came to Hauteville. Your father was my father's rival, and it was natural to me to hate you. And you, my lady stepmother's beggarly foundling, must needs come between me and the girl that was betrothed to me. A pretty gentleman indeed to steal my mistress! I saw through your artifices, and when you came to London, took care to place my spy upon your track."

"What!" I roared, shaking myself free from Philip's grasp.

"Yes, Mr. Simplicity; your chosen friend and boon companion is my led captain, Mr. Hay, a gentleman who has been in my service for the last five years."

"O God, what a dastardly world!"

"Forgive me, Bob; thou'rt the best fellow I ever knew, and I love thee with all my heart," said Hay, with a strange softness in his tone; "but I am a scoundrel by profession. 'Tis one of the trades poor men live by, you see, and men must live."

"Yes, and vipers too; they plead their privilege to crawl and sting. Great God, this is hard!"

I sank into a chair, touched to the very heart by this hideous treachery. I had grown fonder of the man than I thought. As I sat for some moments, confounded, forgetful of Everard Lestrangle, I felt a little hand thrust gently into mine. It was Margery's. The wretched girl had not yet risen from the spot where she had sunk down at my feet.

"Forgive me, Robin," she pleaded; "indeed I did not know it was a trick that was to be played on thee, or I would have died before I had taken part in it. He—Everard—told me it was your wish to marry me; and oh, Robin, I have been cruelly deceived, and am not so guilty as I seem. I will never trouble you dear; you shall see me no more; and the marriage can be undone."

"Yes," cried Everard Lestrangle; "by grim death! Pallid mors is the only parson who can cut the knot which my friend yonder has just tied."

"The bride was married under a false name," I said.

"Yes, but the true one is in the register."

I turned eagerly to the greasy volume that lay open upon the table. Yes, there, below my own signature, appeared that of Margaret Hawker. I remembered how my attention had been distracted while the bride was writing.

"The ceremony could not be more binding if it had been performed in Westminster Abbey. Mrs. Margery is as honest a wife as Lady Caroline Fox. Ma'amselle Adolphine will go back to her service the richer for a fifty-pound note, and will carry her young mistress the pleasing intelligence of your marriage."

"And do you think I will not carry the truth to Miss Hemsley?"

"That will depend on your opportunities. You made an

engagement this evening which you may find somewhat inconvenient to you in your character of bridegroom, and which will certainly put a stop to any stolen visits to the ladies in St. James's Square."

"I made an engagement! What engagement?"

"Sure, 'twas an engagement to serve the Honourable Ayst India Company over in Bengal, and a glorious career it is for a courageous young man!" cried a familiar voice close at hand, and Sergeant O'Blagg came into the room, closely followed by a couple of ruffianly-looking fellows in military trousers and dingy ragged shirts, while three or four others looked in from the doorway.

Before I could utter so much as one cry of anger or surprise, these two scoundrels had gripped me on either side. What followed was the work of a few moments—a sharp, brief struggle for liberty, in which I fought as a man only fights for something dearer than life, striking out right and left, while the hot blood poured over my face from a wound on my head.

I had but just time to see Everard Lestrange and the French-woman rush from the room, dragging Margery with them, while a long, piercing shriek from that wretched girl rang out shrill above the clamour of the rest; the floor seemed to reel beneath my feet, a roaring thunderous noise sounded in my ears, and I knew no more.

I opened my eyes upon the semi-darkness of a dilapidated garret, where I found myself lying on a dirty mattress of hay or flock. The atmosphere was thickened with tobacco-smoke, and what feeble light there was, came from two small windows in the sloping roof, closely barred, and festooned with cobwebs. It was the most wretched place I had ever seen, and for some time after waking from sleep, or stupor, I knew not whether it was not an underground dungeon in which I found myself prisoner.

I lay for some time but half-awake, staring at the bare walls of my prison with a kind of stupid wonder, as if it had been a strange picture in a book, which I contemplated half-asleep, and nowise concerned in the matter. Then, by slow degrees, came a little more consciousness, and I felt that I was in some remote degree interested in this dreary place, and in this aching mass of flesh and bone lying on a mattress but a little softer than the ground.

I tried to lift up my right arm, but found it powerless, and smarting with some recent wound. On this I raised my left, which moved freely enough, but not without some pain, and felt my head, which was bound with wet rags. After this effort I closed my eyes, and was awakened presently by a faint odour of vinegar and a hand pressing a mug of water to my lips with almost womanly softness.

"Who's that?" I asked, opening my eyes.

"One who has deserved your scorn and hatred, but will do

his best to merit your forgiveness," answered a familiar voice; and I saw that the face bent over me was Philip Hay's.

"You here!" I cried; "I don't want your services. I would rather perish of thirst than take a drop of water from the hand of such a traitor. Go to your worthy employer, sir, and claim your reward!"

"I have got it, Bob. When a wise man has done with the tool he has used for his dirty work, he takes care to put it out of the way. Everard Lestrangle promised me a hundred pounds—I have his written bond for the sum—for the safe carrying through of last night's work; but you see he finds it cheaper to hand me over to the Honourable East India Company. Dead men tell no tales, you know, Bob; and a man shipped for Bengal is as good as dead; for what with war, and fever, and famine, and hardship, 'tis long odds if he ever sees Europe again. Drink the water, Robert, in token of forgiveness. You and I are in the same boat, and it is best we should be friends. I was never your enemy but in the way of business, and plotted against you for hire, just as better men will plot against a king. Say you forgive me, child. We are too miserable to afford ourselves the luxury of resentment. But for my care, it is ten to one if your eyes had ever opened on this wretched place, and if you had not been thrust into a nameless grave by night with scarce a prayer said over your poor clay."

"I do not thank you for that," I answered bitterly; "death would be better than to waken in such a place as this."

"Alas! I claim no thanks, Bob; I only ask you to believe that I love thee."

"Is it possible for me to think that, after the way you have used me?"

"It was in my bond, Bob. You have heard of the honour that obtains among thieves. I had pledged myself to carry through this business; and then, there was another inducement—I desperately wanted that hundred pounds. Egad! Bob, I could have sold my own brother for less money. Joseph's brethren did it, you know, and he treated them uncommonly handsomely afterwards. Besides, I was in that reptile's pay."

"And your liberal Mr. Cave, and your history of the Amazons?"

"All purely mythological as those ladies themselves, Robert. I have done an occasional article for Cave; and I know his scrub and hackney writer, Samuel Johnson—a man that talks better than Socrates, and is content to toil in a garret for the wages of a hackney-coachman. But the money I spent while I was with thee came from Everard Lestrangle."

"And that account of your life and adventures with which you entertained me was as mythical as the rest, I conclude?"

"No, 'fore Gad, Bob. I gave you a tolerably true account of myself. My sins there were but of omission. I did not tell you

that after leaving Mallandaine's service I became henchman and hanger-on of your kinswoman's amiable stepson, Mr. Lestrangle, curse him!"

Here a thought flashed across me.

"And you have pandered to his vices, no doubt, as you did to those of your first patron. You can tell me how my poor little foster-sister was robbed of innocence and friends and home."

"In the usual fashion, Bob," my companion answered, with a sigh. "It is as common as an old street-ballad. The very staleness of the thing makes it hateful to a man of genius. But your man of genius must keep body and soul together somehow. There were all the old hackneyed promises—intentions honourable, family reasons why secrecy must be preserved—the old worn-out pleas; and the poor child was but too easily deluded. Your modern fine gentleman will swear to a lie with the easiest air in the world. Men have always done these things, you know; but there was a time when they did them with a bad grace, and were liable to be sorry afterwards. Shame and remorse are out of fashion now. Mr. Lestrangle carried his prize over to Paris, where he introduced her to seven other spirits worse than himself, if that's possible, and was angry with the poor little thing because she sickened at such company. In short, our Don Juan soon grew tired of your little rustic beauty.

"He would have planted her on an elderly scion of the *haute noblesse*, who wanted something young and fresh and pretty to complete the furniture of his summer pavilion near Choisy le Roi. But against this arrangement the girl rebelled sturdily; and by this time Sir Marcus had begun to urge upon his son the necessity of an immediate marriage with the heiress, who might slip through their fingers at any moment. So Mr. Lestrangle hurries back to London, bringing his mistress with him, whom he hides in a shabby lodging hard by Covent Garden; and being well informed of your movements by my agency, he sees that his case is somewhat desperate, and that only violent measures can serve him. Whereupon he buys over the French maid—a deceitful, abandoned creature, always ripe for treachery—and plans the agreeable plot to which you—and I, worse luck!—have fallen victims."

"And that forged letter, on the strength of which Sir Marcus was so quick to condemn me? I make no doubt you could give me some enlightenment on that subject."

"Well, yes, I have heard of the forged letter. Sir Marcus Lestrangle is a diplomatist; and it is just possible he played into his son's hand. Be sure he never relished the notion of your inheriting the bulk of Lady Barbara's fortune, which it is likely you would have done had father and son not succeeded in blasting your character. They have done their work pretty well this time; and may congratulate themselves on a rare success."

"But do you think I shall not tell my own story, and denounce their hellish stratagems, when I escape from this place?"

"Yes, friend Bob, *when* you escape from durance. God grant you and I may live to see the day that sets us at liberty; but I fear me my hair and yours too will be white as silver when that day comes."

"What!" I exclaimed, "do you mean to say that in a Christian land, in this free country, of whose liberty Englishmen boast so loudly, they can make us as close prisoners as if we were clapped in some underground cell of the French Bastille, by virtue of Madame Pompadour's *lettre de cachet*?"

"I mean to say that the crimping sergeant into whose jaws I introduced you—more shame to me for a treacherous scoundrel!—will swear to an engagement between both of us, which latter turn of fortune but serves me fairly for my wickedness. He will hold us to an engagement never made, Bob—for the difference between crimping and kidnapping is only a distinction of words—and we shall be kept in this loathsome hole with the rest of those unlucky wretches whom you see sprawling yonder, until the Honourable East India Company are ready to draft us on board ship secretly somewhere down the river, and keep us close under hatches till we are out at open sea; and then they will land us among the cobras and tigers, to defend John Company's factories, and fight the yellow-faced Hindoos."

"But is there no such thing as escape, Phil?" I asked, in a whisper, and with a glance towards one of the small close-barred windows.

"Alas! no, Bob. We are a valuable commodity; and rely on it they keep us in a strong box."

"What! and we are held in durance within a few hundred yards of Guildhall, and can find no means of communicating with the authorities?"

"Nay, Bob, our gaolers will take care to prevent us. We are here in the very heart of savage London; and not that jungle to which we shall by-and-by be drafted is better stocked with foul creeping reptiles and beasts of prey. Alas! my simple Templar, thou hast heard men talk of Alsatia, but didst not know that in this civilized city there lies a wilderness more dangerous than burning Afric's sands or Asia's pathless mountains, peopled by creatures as deadly, and even more treacherous, than tiger or serpent. Thou hast not heard of the ruined houses of Shoe Lane and Stonecutter Street, and the deeds that are done in the darkness behind those blank-shuttered windows. To thee Black Mary's Hole and Copenhagen House are empty sounds, signifying nothing; but to the citizen of London those names have a sinister meaning. All this part of London is dedicated to infamy and crime; and I know not when the reforming power shall arise to sweep away these dens of iniquity. Sure 'twould



take another great fire to purify them, and another plague would be scarce a calamity if it decimated their inhabitants."

"But where are we, Phil?" I asked, addressing him with my accustomed friendliness, and for the moment forgetting what reason I had to hate him. I was indeed, as he had said, too wretched to be very angry. Every other feeling was swallowed up in the overwhelming thought of my misery.

"In the next house to that where you were married. It was Mr. Lestrangle made his bargain with the parson, not I. They were lies I told you about the business. My noble patron made his plans, and found the crimping sergeant, and you and I went meek as sheep to the slaughter. We fought lustily for our lives though, Bob, both of us. Half a dozen hulking wretches, armed to the teeth, surrounded us, and when you went down I had my battle for liberty. But the odds were too many against me; and when I felt my arms pinioned, and the iron rim of a pistol's muzzle unpleasantly cold against my forehead, I threw up the sponge. 'Tis little good wounding a hydra; and I saw more hulking scoundrels lurking in the doorway. I knocked under, luckily without much hurt, and with all my senses about me, while you, poor wretch, lay like a log at my feet. They picked you up, and carried you through a passage and doorway leading from that house into this—I following. I got a glimpse of other rooms as we were led up to this, which is at the top of a somewhat lofty house; and I saw they were full of wretches playing cards, and sprawling on mattresses, and drinking and brawling, by the light of foul-smelling tallow-candles, prisoners like ourselves. Whereby I conclude there is a house full of recruits for the Honourable East India Company's service, waiting till there is a vessel ready on which to draft them. The Company charter ships nowadays; but not long ago they did all their trading on their own bottoms."

It was quite dark by this time; and I asked my companion how long we had been in this dismal place.

"Something less than eighteen hours. It was last night, or this morning, at two o'clock, that we were taken prisoners. There has been an old hag in and out half a dozen times to see you. They want you to live, you see, for you are of some value alive, and dead there is the trouble of your burial. Folks have a knack of dying under this kind of durance. It is not three months since the good citizens about St. Bride's Churchyard were scandalized by frequent funerals that were performed under cover of night, with maimed rites, and no entry made in the register. 'Twas found on inquiry that the corpses came from a receiving-house for East India recruits hard by, where a fever had broken out among the unhappy creatures. But this is no cheering talk, Bob, for a sick man."

"Death is the only cheerful thought you can give me," I

answered bitterly. "Death! sure I am dead already. What can death do more than treachery has done for me?—to cut me off from all I hold dear; and, alas! I die dishonoured, and my darling will be told I was a liar and hypocrite, who never loved her, and married another woman, scorning that sweet girl's affection. Death! 'Tis a thousand times worse than death. It is purgatory, a state of torment dreadful as the inextinguishable fires of hell. Get from the side of my bed, Philip Hay; for the first time I can lift my right arm I shall surely raise it to slay you. 'Tis by your help I lie perishing here."

"I deserve no better at your hands," he answered moodily; "but you will scarcely care to murder a wretch so ready to die. It would be like slaughtering a rotten sheep. What have I to live for more than you, Master Robert? Toil and danger and scanty food, and death from the hand of some tawny heathen. Faith, we are in the same boat; and to fight and throw each other overboard would but be mutual charity!"

I heard a key turn, and the hag, of whom Philip Hay had spoken, came into the room with a candle and our suppers—a tempting banquet of mouldy cheese and coarse bread.

"If you want beer you must pay for it," she said, with an imbecile grin; and Philip threw her a shilling, for which she brought by-and-by a quart of liquor which my companion declared to be the vilest twopenny he had ever tasted.

"These places are on the model of sponging-houses," he said; "and if a prisoner has money he is made to bleed pretty freely. The penniless they must feed somehow, to keep life in the bodies which are wanted as food for gunpowder."

"I have a pocket-book full of notes," said I; "would it not be wise to spend them in bribing yonder hag?"

"Be sure you have the money before you talk of spending it. In such dens as these they are apt to be handy at picking a pocket. Your coat and waistcoat lie under your head for a willow. The money was in your coat pocket, I suppose?"

Yes, the pocket-book had been there, and it was gone—stolen in the scuffle, no doubt. I bitterly regretted this money, for I could not but believe it might have enabled me to buy over my gaolers to my own interest; but I think I still more regretted the book which contained those comforting sentences of Scripture and philosophy hastily scribbled by the hand of my benefactress.

"Is it my fate through life to lose everything?" I asked. Parents, before I had ever known them; friends and good name, and money and liberty? Did I enter this world doomed to loss and slavery; predoomed, because of my father's folly? Are my teeth to be for ever set on edge by the sour grapes he ate?"

Happily—and this amidst such utter misery was the solitary consoling circumstance—I had yet the locket with my lady's portrait and hair, which I had long ago hung round my neck

by a stout black ribbon, and had worn faithfully every day of my life.

"Even if you had the money I doubt if it would serve you," said Phil Hay, seeing me lost in a gloomy despair. "The crone who waits on us is half an idiot, too foolish to aid you if she had the will. Our gaolers are surly ruffians, who would take your money and laugh at you afterwards. 'Tis as well to be spared the anguish of a delusive hope. No, Bob, there is no chance for us but to serve our time out yonder, with the chance of coming back some day, if it is our destiny to escape fever and sword, and famine and shipwreck."

"What is the period? or is there any fixed period for our slavery?"

"Alack! I know not, friend. Were it the regular service to which we were bound, there are rules I could tell you; but of this irregular trader's Company I can affirm nothing. It is an accursed monopoly, opposed to all laws of justice and common sense; and its members make their own regulations. There was a sturdy endeavour some ten years since to throw open our commerce with the East to all adventurous merchants; but by specious argument and solid bribery, in the shape of a loan to Government, the Company got their charter renewed, and have now a pretty sure footing in that distant world for which you and I have our places booked."

After this I sought no further knowledge. I was weakened by the pain of my wounds, and lay languid, almost apathetic, while Philip Hay watched and nursed me with a tenderness that could not but touch my heart, despite my sense of his late infernal treachery. 'Twas strange to be thus cared for by the man who had destroyed me.

I remained in this half-torpid condition for some days, eating scarce anything, and only nourished by some very vile broth which Phil induced the hag to procure for me on his assertion that I was at death's door, and a little brandy, obtained from the same source, and paid for almost as dear as if it had been melted gold.

Under my companion's care I mended a little, and was able to rise from my wretched pallet, wash and dress myself, and pace feebly to and fro our dreary dungeon—than which I little thought ever to inhabit a more dismal abode. Then came upon me in all its intensity the agony of despair; and never in all my after career did I suffer pangs so keen as those that rent my heart during my habitation of this loathsome garret. Cut off alive from all I loved, tortured by the certainty that the woman for whom I would have given my life must needs believe me the basest of men, there was no source, save One to which I had not yet learned to apply myself, whence I could hope for comfort.

"Dora will believe me a hypocrite and a liar," I repeated to myself perpetually; and this one idea seemed to be the begin-

ning and end of my misery. My noble benefactress's ill opinion, her bitter disappointment in one she had trusted, I could not yet bring myself to consider. My dear love, my plighted wife, forsaken by me without a word, abandoned to the slow tortures of domestic persecution; it was of her I thought, and for a long while of her alone. No, not alone; one lurid image glared red across the sad picture of my love's despair, and wore the shape of Everard Lestrangle. I had not yet learned to entreat compassion from the Divine Judge of all mankind, but daily and nightly did I implore the vengeance of Heaven on the head of this consummate villain, and that I might be permitted to become the instrument of that almighty wrath. For a meeting with this man, foot to foot and hand to hand, I thirsted with even a more passionate desire than that with which I languished to fling myself at Dora Hemsley's feet and assure her of my fidelity. Alas! not for years were either of these meetings to take place; and here was I, at twenty years of age, prisoner in a garret, with no hope of change except that which would send me forth to eternal exile; yes, eternal; for what were the chances of future distant years to a wretch who hungered for present relief to his immeasurable woes? It was just possible that in the remote future I might be restored to liberty and England; but could I live upon the sorry comfort of such a possibility? And I might come back to find Dora's grave, or to know that she was married and happy, and had forgotten me. It would be the return of a ghost, not a living man—a miserable shadow of past hope and joy restored from the grave to trouble the peace of the living. Great Heaven, what an ingenious torment had Everard Lestrangle imagined for the gratification of his malice! To have murdered me would have been a poor revenge compared to this hellish conspiracy, which cut me off from all that constitutes life, and yet left me to exist and suffer.

The injuries I had received in the brief skirmish that followed my wretched wedding were severe, and in spite of Philip Hay's care of me I suffered a relapse, and lay prostrate with a low fever, while the garret we inhabited received several new inmates in the persons of recruits voluntary and recruits involuntary like Hay and myself. The former smoked, drank, and played cards, with much contentment and jollity, the latter alternately bewailed their fate, cursed their captors, and joined in the amusements of their happier companions. Of the land to which we were destined to travel, most of these had but a vague and foolish notion. Some confounded the East Indies with the two Americas, others believed the Great Mogul still powerful as in the days of Aurungzebe, and ruler over millions of African negroes. All had a confused idea that the Indians of Asia scalped their enemies like the copper-coloured natives of Canada, that an Englishman single-handed was a match for

about fifty of these Hindoo pagans, that diamond-mines and temples amply furnished with jewelled idols, accessible to the greed of any European adventurer, abounded throughout the Oriental continent, and that gold-dust was the staple of the soil. Ignorance so complete, or half knowledge so bewildering, as obtained among these men it would have been almost impossible to conceive, had one not overheard their conversation; and I was amazed to find that a couple of fine gentlemen who had been surprised into an engagement under the influence of a tavern punch-bowl were no better informed than the tag-rag and bobtail that formed the rest of the company.

Utterly helpless though I was, I could not shut from my mind all idea of escape. I questioned Philip Hay upon this subject; but he bade me at once dismiss so futile a hope from my mind.

"You can't suppose I should omit to reconnoitre our quarters," he said. "I took my survey before those fellows came in, and discovered the hopelessness of our case. If you were strong enough to climb like a cat—instead of which you can but just crawl across the room—there would be no chance for us. We are here at the top of a lofty house; below us a stone-paved yard, amply furnished with spikes, and in which half a dozen soldier-fellows, with a stout bulldog for their companion, seem to make their perpetual abode. Nor is this all, for as your own eyes will inform you, our windows are stoutly barred; and our friends, the recruits who have joined of their own accord, would no doubt be prompt to curry favour by giving the alarm and joining against us in any shindy that might follow. No, Bob; so long as we remain here, there is nothing for us but patience and fortitude. They must convey us somehow from here to shipboard, and on that passage rests our sole hope. If you see any chance of escape *then*, snatch it without wasting a moment on consideration; you *can't* easily be worse off than you are, for once safely shipped, our doom is sealed. And now keep yourself quiet, Bob, so that you may the sooner get the better of this foolish fever, which unfits you for seizing any opportunity that may offer."

I did not recover from my fever in time to avail myself of any chance that might have arisen between our removal and our shipment, for within a few days of this conversation we were suddenly aroused in the dead of the night with a summons to prepare for our journey. Our preparations were of the briefest, the wealthiest among us possessing no more than a bundle; and then, amid hurry and clamour unutterable, we descended the steep dilapidated stair, dimly lighted by a single oil-lamp, and guarded by Sergeant O'Blagg and half a dozen private soldiers. I was barely able to limp downstairs, leaning heavily on Philip's shoulder.

"O Phil!" I cried as we went down, "I hope they won't part us."

Yes, strange as this may seem, in the utter abandonment of my state, I now clung to him who had betrayed me into this misery. In the living grave to which we had both descended, his was the sole familiar face that linked me with the past and assured me of my own identity; and even the sense of this I might well have lost amidst surroundings so strange and under circumstances so far beyond the limits of every-day experience.

I was thrust with two other invalids, whom I had not encountered until this moment, into a wagon, where we lay helpless upon the straw at the bottom. The wagon was then filled as closely as it could be packed with other recruits, amongst whom I was glad to perceive my betrayer, Philip Hay. Half a dozen sturdy fellows, in military dress, and armed to the teeth, sat at the entrance of the wagon, and kept guard over those within. My late acquaintance, the Irish sergeant, took his post beside the driver, whom he directed; and in this order (the wagon holding in all about twenty people) we rumbled along the deserted streets by many windings and turnings, which led I knew not where. I did, indeed, contrive to lift a corner of the covering of the wagon and peer out into the night, but could distinguish nothing except that the streets were dark and narrow. Chance of escape there was none, had my condition been ever so favourable to the attempt.

After a journey which seemed to me interminable, the wagon came to a stop, and we were taken out in a dreary spot down the river, on the Middlesex shore, and, as I believe, somewhere opposite Greenwich, for I perceived the roofs of many houses backed by rising ground, which I supposed to belong to that place. Here we had but little time for looking around us, but were at once huddled into a boat, like a flock of animals destined for slaughter; and as the rowers' oars dipped slowly into the river, I could but think of that other boat in which we were all of us destined to journey, and that it might be better for most of us were we but shadows hastening to the lower world under the grim convoy of Charon. A little way ahead of us we saw the stern of a large vessel, with lights burning dimly in the faint glimmer of early morning. This ship was our destination. We were handed up the ladder, and conducted to a dismal region called the orlop deck, lighted only by padlocked lanterns, and with no ventilation save from the hatchways. Here we were ordered to shake down as best we might, amidst a company of above a hundred recruits, and an allowance of hot coffee and ship-biscuit was served out to such as had the capacity to eat. I had none, nor any inclination to stir from the spot where I had placed myself. I lay in my hammock staring blankly before me, with such a sense of anguish as was even yet new to me. Until this period I must have hoped, or my present despair could scarce have been so profound. I

listened idly to the perpetual tramp of hurrying feet, the roar and clamour of preparation above my head; and yet not quite idly, for I knew that every movement of those eager sailors hastened the ship that was to carry me from all I loved.

The sun rose as the vessel weighed anchor, and the scene on the orlop deck, as the glorious eastern light streamed in upon us through the open hatchways, would need the pencil of Mr. Hogarth to depict. Invalided wretches groaning in their narrow hammocks, or stretched on the bare planks, soldiers and recruits for the most part half-drunk and already bawling for more liquor, while some determined gamblers had contrived to settle to a game of cards, with the top of an empty cask for their table. On every side riot, confusion, squalor, and debauchery; while above us rose the mellow sound of the sailors' voices singing as they weighed the anchor.

"We're off, Bob," cried Philip Hay, as a loud cheer rang out from the deck. "Good-bye, mother country, and bad luck to you! No cruel stepdame ever treated her brats worse than you've served me; and I wish you no good at parting, except that you may be rich enough to provide a gallows for one gentleman of my acquaintance. Nay, Bob, cheer up; things mayn't be quite as bad as they seem. There are fortunes to be picked up out yonder by clever fellows, and who knows but you and I may have our chance? We're beginning the world like newborn babes, and it may fall out we have silver spoons in our mouths."

I turned from him, sick at heart, and buried my face in my meagre blanket, sobbing aloud. Yes, I had hoped until now. I had believed that some event—nay, even a miracle from Heaven itself—must befall to save me from this hapless fate; and now I knew that hope was gone, and Dora, reputation, friends, and country were alike lost to me.

And thus, for the second time, I began the world.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### MY HONOURABLE MASTERS.

Now followed a passage of my life so long and dreary, a period of such utter and hideous monotony, that the memory of it is rather like the confused recollection of a procession of nightmare-dreams than of an actual experience in this waking world. For ten months our ship ploughed the waters, touching at Madeira, and the Cape, where we were not allowed the privilege of going on shore. For the greater part of a year we wretches lay crowded together in our miserable cavernous abode on the orlop deck—or snatched a brief relief from gloom and

suffocation at such times as the captain graciously allowed us to take the air on the booms, or when we took it in turns to share the seamen's watch, but for which respite from the sickening odours of that Gehenna below, we must assuredly have perished. No words can tell how we suffered; and if the helpless African bondsmen in the middle passage endure more than we did, man's cruelty to his fellow-men is indeed an illimitable quantity. Our quarters were of the closest, our food of the roughest; water was doled out to us by the veriest thimblefuls; the atmosphere we breathed was a compound of foulest stench; the very pigs and poultry—narrow as was the room allowed them—fared better than we. And this slow torture lasted for ten months.

Brief was the excitement which the sight of land afforded to us; 'twas a bitter, desperate kind of pleasure, a very passion of longing and despair, like that of a lover who snatches one fond look at the mistress who can never be his. To this day I can recall the violent throbbing of my heart as, through the thick haze of evening, Madeira rose upon our larboard bow, and we poor wretches crowded together at the bulwarks and almost fought for a sight of that strange island. 'Twas a month after this that a shoal of dolphins played round the ship; and as these free and happy creatures sported in the sun, I could but remember the legend of Arion, and long for some friendly monster whose scaly back might bear me to the shore. Alas, the days of fable are long gone, and the gods come no more upon earth to rescue man from his fellow-man's oppression!

We had not been long afloat before my fever left me, still very feeble and unlike my former self, but no longer on the sick list. The first business of my convalescence was to obtain the means of writing—which I accomplished with some difficulty, so scant were the accommodations of these dismal quarters. Provided at last with these, I penned a long letter to Lady Barbara, detailing the story of my capture, and describing my present miserable condition. I besought her by the love she had borne my father, by her Christian pity for undeserved misfortune, to attempt my early rescue from a fate so hopeless. I warned this generous friend that the same treachery which had compassed my ruin would blacken my character, and that slanders the most plausible would be invented to rob me of her confidence; and then followed the incoherent entreaties of despair, passionate lamentations, wild messages of affection for the beloved girl I had for ever lost, which, in some small measure, relieved an overcharged heart and brain.

This letter I directed under cover to the milliner in Long Acre, and having secured it, placed the packet in my waistcoat pocket, in readiness for any homeward-bound vessel with which our captain might exchange greetings. Day after day, week after



week, I watched and waited for the friendly sail that was to convey this letter, and my heart sickened as the days wore out, and no vessel came within hail of us. Nor was this all; for on one occasion I endured the sharper agonies of disappointed hope, when, on our captain hailing a trading-vessel, she turned out to be a brig laden with Spanish wine, and bound for the Mauritius.

We had been more than six months afloat when the opportunity I so longed for at last arrived in the shape of a homeward-bound Indiaman, to which the cutter was speedily despatched with a couple of officers. I was not the only one among the recruits eager to send home some greeting; but when I and half a dozen others crowded to the open hatchway and besought the captain to despatch our letters, the kindly gentleman laughed us to scorn. Did we think he could trouble himself with the whims and humours of such dirt? And what had we to write about, pray? Complaints of our treatment, no doubt, which would only make mischief at home, and rob the Honourable East India Company of good soldiers.

"No," cried the captain, "I know what a set of lying, ungrateful rascals you are, and you shall send none of your lies to England by my help."

This speech the skipper liberally garnished with such blasphemies as were the salt of his daily discourse, and then roared to one of his men to shut down the hatchway and drive that vermin into their holes.

There is no despot so awful as the tyrant who reigns upon his own quarter-deck. Against his cruel will there is no resistance except crime, and to oppose his hellish tyranny is to be at once involved in rebellion and bloodshed. The spark of mutiny is a fire that spreads swift as flame among the parched jungle-grass of the Sunderbunds, and I knew that it would need but little to stir that idle Pandemonium between decks into an active Inferno. Nor was the skipper a person of small importance in the social scale. Eastward of the Cape this Company's captain took precedence of a captain in His Majesty's navy, and he and his brother captains had a seat at the council board, at any of the Presidencies they might happen to be at.

I crept back to my hole with the other vermin, and lay there as desolate as, and more desperate than Job; for I needed no tempter to bid me curse God and die. I think at this time my sufferings had banished all Christian feeling from my mind; and if I endured life when self-murder seemed a relief so easy, it was from no faith in the Divine Providence, no fear of the Almighty wrath, but from the one savage hope that, in some time to come, when my cup of anguish had been drained to the very dregs, Fate would give me the opportunity of being revenged on the author of my misery.

After the captain's refusal to send my letter I abandoned myself utterly to despair, and fell into a state scarcely less degraded than that of my companions. Like them, I no longer kept count of the wretched days; like them, I slept a dull dreamless sleep through the dreary nights; like them, I ate and drank the scanty portion given to me with the appetite of some half-savage beast; like them, I forgot the existence of a better world than this floating hell, and blasphemed the God who ruled above that happier earth. And thus the time went past us somehow; in days that had far less of colour and variety than the waves that rolled against our creaking timbers; in nights that were darker than the storm-clouds that brooded over our vessel between the Cape and Ceylon; until one dull stormy morning there rose the cry of land, and a friendly sailor told us that the temple of Juggernaut was visible about fifteen miles to the north-west.

Every creature among our luckless herd felt a curiosity to behold this first spectacle which our new country offered us. We crowded to the hatchway, and in the confusion of the moment were suffered to gaze our fill. Dimly discernible to the naked eye appeared the dark outline of a pagoda which, at that distance, seemed not unlike a huge church tower. Bernier's *Travels* had made me familiar with the monstrous worship that prevails in this temple of the Indian Moloch, the road to which for fifty miles is bestrewn with bleaching bones and rotting carrion, and I felt that the shrine of a religion so ghastly was a fitting object to greet my eyes at the end of this fatal voyage.

"Would to Heaven I could believe in the Brahmin's Paradise, and after steeping my senses in some maddening spirit, cast myself beneath the wheels of the monster god's triumphal car!" I said to myself, as I stood among the squalid crowd, gazing at that dim outline in the distance.

We fancied ourselves now at the end of our journey; but we were doomed to lie within sight of Juggernaut for two days and nights, and then made but slow head against the swell and current from the north-east. The coast of Orixá is so low as to be indistinguishable from a very short distance, and our sailors were compelled to feel their way by soundings every half-hour. Meanwhile the situation of the herd below was, if possible, a little increased in wretchedness, for the ship was being painted in order to make a fair show in harbour; and we poor creatures had the worst of the paint, which did much to render an already stifling atmosphere utterly unbearable. Nor did we fare any better by venturing on deck, whence we were driven by execrations from the busy seamen, and had thus no alternative from the misery of our hole below.

I wondered, as I heard the men whistling gaily at their work, to think how brave a thing the vessel would look riding at

anchor, and how little any stranger who gazed upon her would suspect the anguish and cruelty that had been suffered between her decks.

On the next day we anchored in Sagor Roads, and the watch upon us being now somewhat relaxed, I crept up to the gun-deck, and from an unoccupied porthole enjoyed a clear view of Sagor Island—a flat, swampy shore, with tall trees that looked like firs, and beneath them vivid green jungle. Here I saw animals browsing among the swampy grass, and was afterwards informed that these were wild deer, and that the island is furthermore infested by tigers, who will even swim off from the coast to destroy any imprudent boatman who trusts his bark within their ken—whence it is that no bribe will induce the natives to approach this savage wilderness.

While I peered from my porthole at this low-lying island, a dark object floated close beside my post of observation, and drifted slowly past with the tide. It was a human corpse, consigned to the sacred river—perhaps ere death had closed the scene—by the pious hands of its dutiful progeny.

“Alas! poor ghost,” I said, “art thou the sole friend who dost welcome me to this barbarous shore, where superstition has added her own peculiar horrors to the natural terrors of death?”

While we lay at anchor a crowd of boats surrounded us, laden with fruit and other merchandise, while Sircars—men who practise as agents and money-lenders, and who surpass their fellow-practitioners, the Jews, in the arts of their profession—exercised their fascinations upon the captain and officers of the ship. Now, for the first time, I had the opportunity of observing the living Gentoo, and in his delicately-moulded form and finely-chiselled features I saw much to induce the belief that from this Oriental stock sprang that flower of antique civilization, the Greek.

After lying for some hours at anchor we approached the side of the river opposite Kedgeroe, and I beheld a dismal shore, thickly wooded, black, monotonous, the very home of all noxious and fatal creatures, from the tiger and the cobra down to the scorpion and the mosquito. Night closed in as I gazed upon this dreary coast, and lightnings flashed incessantly above the fever-haunted woods. The sailors spoke of the place as the grave of all hapless wretches who were doomed to remain many days in its neighbourhood.

At Diamond Harbour we anchored again, and here we recruits were drafted into a smaller vessel sent down from Calcutta for our reception; and on board this we made our voyage up the Hooghly river, a noble stream, across which our vessel tacked in a sea.

And now the end of our troublous transit had come, or not—the end, for we were put ashore some miles from the

British settlement to which we were bound, and had a weary march through rank woods of Oriental foliage, and afterwards by an ill-made sandy road, scarce worthy the name, with ditches of stagnant water on either side. This being the dry season, we tramped through an intolerable cloud of dust, which, together with the heat, well-nigh stifled us; and so onward, with but brief respite, till we came to one of the ill-guarded gates of Calcutta.

Hence we were marched to the fort, and here we found a very meagre force of mixed soldiery—English, Hindoos, and Topases, so called from the fact of their wearing hats, a species of native Christians, a mixed race, produced by the intermarriage of natives with the early Portuguese settlers. I had heard and read so much of Oriental magnificence as seen by Jesuit travellers at Delhi and other cities of the East, that I had good reason to be disgusted with the English settlement to which Fate had brought me; but it was yet the humble beginning of British rule, and the conqueror who was to set his foot upon the neck of Indian power, and transform a trading Company into a splendid despotism, was but upon the threshold of his marvellous career. I look back to this period, remembering that it was then I first heard the name of Robert Clive, and can still but wonder at the obscure commencement of that heroic romance of which this young man was destined to be the protagonist. When I landed on the shores of the Hooghly in February, 1751, it was but six years since Clive had arrived at Madras, with no higher hope than belongs to the position of a clerk or writer in the Company's civil service. He came, poor, friendless, and lonely, to the shore of that land which he was fated to hold by a grander power than India had felt since the sceptre of the Moguls slipped from the loosening grasp of Aurungzebe. I, who have drained the bitter cup which stepmother Fortune offers to the lips of friendless youth, can but think with a peculiar sympathy of this unfriended lad, who was sent to India chiefly because his father knew not what to do with him in England, and whose lofty spirit sickened at the common round of daily drudgery, while his warm heart languished in the loneliness of a land so strange.

Nothing could well be more insignificant than Robert Clive's start in life. He whose name was to be in less than ten years the wonder of the civilized world, and the chief glory of Great Britain, had not a single friend, nay, scarce an acquaintance, in Madras, and was of a temper too wayward and reserved to seek introductions by the common arts of society. Studious as he was proud he esteemed the admission to the Governor's excellent library the highest privilege he enjoyed. I have been told how that constitutional melancholy, which was so near akin to madness, displayed itself even at this early age, and how one day on a companion coming into the young man's room in

Writer's Buildings, Clive begged him to take up a pistol and fire it out of the window. The man complied. "Then, by Heaven, I am reserved for something," cried Clive; "for I have twice snapped that pistol at my head." Alas! 'twas but a premature rehearsal of a future tragedy!\*

The fort at Calcutta was ill-defended, and worse garrisoned. The wide ditch, begun in 1742 by the Indian inhabitants of the colony, at their own expense, and under a panic-like terror of a Morattoe invasion, had never been finished. It was designed to encircle the Company's bounds, and would have been, when perfect, seven miles in extent; but when three miles had been completed, after a labour of six months, the Bengalese, with true Indian supineness, desisted from the work; nor did the Company care for its completion, seeing that no Morattoes had ever been on the western side of the river within sixty miles of Calcutta, and that Allaverdy, the Soubahdar of Bengal and Orixá, exerted himself vigorously to prevent their incursions into the Island of Cossimbuzar.

When I first entered Fort William, I was completely ignorant of the present condition of the country in which I found myself. Hakluyt's voyages and Bernier's pleasant book had made me tolerably familiar with the splendid court and city of the Mahometan conquerors of Hindostan, but of Indian history since the death of Aurungzebe and the decline of the Mogul power I knew scarcely anything; and I cannot but wonder at the small degree of interest which Englishmen at home felt in the adventures of their countrymen in this strange land.

When Philip Hay and I, with the rest of the recruits, reached our destination, we found the meagre garrison of Calcutta commanded by five captains, with corresponding subordinate officers, who agreed in nothing so heartily as their contempt for the station to which they were appointed, and their neglect of all duties connected with it. To drink, to sleep, to gamble, to intrigue with loose-lived native women, and to absent themselves from their quarters on every possible occasion, in order to indulge their fancy for the field-sports of the adjoining country, formed the rule of their lives. They had indeed sorry inducement for fidelity to their posts. Nothing could be more dismal than life in the fort, and in the town of Calcutta, where the few European houses scattered among the ruder native habitations were in the occupation of British traders and merchants, who thought of nothing but the rapid increase of their wealth, or were absorbed in the discussion of their petty disputes with the Company's committee at home.

And thus did Sergeant O'Blagg's florid promises of Oriental glory and plunder result in the guardianship of a factory, or storehouse for cotton-stuffs; and I found myself at twenty

\* See Appendix, Note A.

years of age the companion of a mixed assemblage, and subject to the tyranny of the Irish sergeant, who proved himself a truculent scoundrel, before whom the Topases and native soldiers—spahis, or sepoy, as they were called by us—quailed and trembled.

I have but little need to linger over this portion of my Indian experiences. My life for the space of one year was a blank, the monotony of which was broken only by some petty variety in the details of my suffering. I, whose youth had known only the refined labours of a scholar, found myself working in a ditch with a mixed gang of British recruits and tawny Hindoos, at some necessary repair of our feeble fortifications, exposed to the glare of a meridian sun in a copper-coloured sky, and threatened with the lash at every symptom of flagging industry.

Our military education meanwhile was of a most primitive order. We shared the drill of the sepoy, who wore their native costume of turban, shirt, and loose cotton trousers, and wielded their native arms of sword and target. The number of our officers was in ridiculous proportion to the pitiful handful of troops, not two hundred in all, and but sixty of these Englishmen, the greater number of my fellow-voyagers having been drafted off to Madras. They were too lazy to give us much instruction, too indifferent or unexpectant of danger to be interested in their duty; nor did the seizure and French occupation of Madras, with its loss of millions to the English Company, arouse the garrison of Calcutta to any extraordinary exertion. It appears to me, indeed, that it has ever been a quality of the British mind to await the imminent approach of a peril before taking measures to prevent it; and it was only in the fatal summer of '56 that the five captains of our garrison discovered how ill we were defended.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### PROVIDENCE SENDS ME A FRIEND.

DURING my first dismal year at Calcutta the native magistracy of that presidency was chiefly in the hands of a black Zemindar, or magistrate, one Govindram Metre, who acted as subordinate of the English Zemindar, and deputy during the intervals that frequently occurred between the lapse of one appointment and the commencement of another. It is not to be supposed that a government which depended upon the instructions of a committee at fifteen thousand miles' distance, and was subject to the caprices and often ignorant errors of private individuals, actuated sometimes by private interests, and frequently by private dislikes, could be exempt from abuses; and this frequent change

of Zemindars, who rarely held the appointment long enough to learn the least of its arduous and numerous duties, was one of the worst among them.

Before Govindram Metre all native causes, civil and criminal, were at this particular period adjudged in a tribunal entitled the Court of Cutcherry. In common with most Hindoos, his ruling passion was avarice, and he was only to be propitiated by gifts, while his power extended to the dispensation of the lash, fine, and imprisonment. The luckless wretch who had not so much as a handful of pice to offer as tribute could expect but scanty grace from this functionary; and before the first year of my residence was ended I had seen many among my coloured comrades writhing under the lashes administered by Govindram's subordinates. I had seen a good deal of the Black Zemindar, and had heard many scandals concerning the supposed sources of his reputed wealth, when it was my own ill-fortune to become subject to his tyranny.

The Hindoo year, which commences in April, was not quite three months old, and the summer solstice was still at its height, when I began to suffer from a low fever resembling that which had chained me to my mattress in the Fleet Lane crimping-house. The damp enervating heat of the Bengal climate was in itself enough to cause sickness amongst Europeans, who were compelled to labour without regard to the conditions which only render residence in this country tolerable to the foreigner. Joined to this, I suffered from inadequate food, miserable lodging, a fitful indulgence in spirituous liquors, that were only agreeable to me because they enabled me for the moment to forget my wretchedness, and a constant depression of mind, unrelieved even by hope: for the letter of appeal which I had contrived to despatch to Lady Barbara soon after my arrival was yet unnoticed. It is not to be wondered, then, that my health languished and my strength declined. The repairs of the fortifications, trifling as they were, were not yet complete; for an absolute want of system prevailed at this station, whereby no necessary work was ever finished; and, ill as I was, I was made to perform my share of the arduous labour—now employed in digging the foundations of a wall, now in wheeling barrows of rubbish for the construction of an earthwork.

I was like to have dropped one day under this work, when Sergeant O'Blagg, who was superintending our labours, attacked me with a sudden fury that for the moment well-nigh took away my breath.

"Look at that rascal, now," he cried to a young ensign who was lolling beside him on the curtain above us. "Did your honour ever see such a lazy vagabone? Oi've had my oi upon n for the last tree days, and divil a bit harther has he worked a ye see him now.—Don't dhrag the barrow along like that,

ye scoundrel, but put your shawlther to it with a will, or oi'l know the raison whoy, ye idle omathawn!"

For the moment I was too weak to answer him.

"Don't you see that the lad's ill?" roared out a voice from the distance (Philip Hay's), while the tawny wretches digging near me looked on and grinned.

"Ill! yes," cried the sergeant; "he shams ill to skulk his work, the idle beggar, but I'll have none of his malingering!" and, leaping down from the curtain, he ran forward as if about to hit me. But I had just mustered strength to wheel my barrow of rubble to the summit of the mound, and the position of advantage was now mine. "You unconscionable skulk!" roared O'Blagg, shaking his clenched fist at me; "this comes of enlisting a sham gentleman. I might have known you'd make no sojer, and never urrun the cost of your passage; and if it hadn't been to obleege a gentleman who wanted to be rid of his stepmother's bastard cousin, I——"

He had no opportunity of finishing the sentence, for anger lent me a spurious kind of strength, and I hoisted my barrow of sand and rubbish aloft, and emptied its contents upon the head of my assailant in a suffocating shower.

A dozen fellows seized and dragged me up to the little terrace on the top of the curtain, where the ensign lolled with folded arms, grinning at his subordinate's discomfiture.

My outrage upon my superior was sufficiently obvious. The ensign, who was about my own age, and obviously amused by O'Blagg's stifled execrations and frantic efforts to get rid of the earth and sand that covered his head and shoulders, felt it, nevertheless, his duty to punish me.

"Upon my word this is too bad," he said very mildly; "though that fellow O'Blagg deserves to get into trouble with his long Irish tongue. But insubordination of this kind won't do, you see, my lad; and as the captain's out of the way—in point of fact, so uncommonly cut last night that he can't show to-day, and the senior-lieutenant has gone up the country pig-shooting—I think you'd better take him to the Black Hole."

"In irons; ye'll put him in irons, your honour?" remonstrated O'Blagg, in a suffocated voice.

"Oh, very well, put him in irons if you like," cried the ensign, with a merciful wink to the men, which plainly meant no irons.

On this I was conveyed to the Black Hole, that too famous prison, which I was doomed once again to occupy under circumstances that were to make that occupation distinguished among the darkest records of man's cruelty to the end of time.

The dungeon itself was in no manner alarming of aspect. It was the common prison of the fort, in which European or native delinquents were indiscriminately cast for any military misdemeanour.



I found myself in a square chamber of some twenty feet by eighteen, with two small windows looking westward, a direction from which no breath of air is to be expected during this summer season. To say that the dungeon was somewhat close and airless in the occupation of one person is perhaps to be fastidious; but I would gladly have preferred a more airy apartment for my night's repose; and I lay down in a corner of my cell with a supreme distaste for my strange quarters; though Heaven knows the great barrack chamber where I ordinarily spent my nights with the rest of the private soldiers on a wooden platform, was no Sybarite's resting-place.

Great God! could I but have conceived the horrid sufferings that were by-and-by to be endured in that very dungeon, what nightmare-visions must have broken my fitful slumbers, what hideous cries and groans must have sounded upon my sleeping senses, prophetic of agonies to come! But this one exquisite anguish of foreknowledge being spared to mankind, my feverish slumbers were undisturbed by painful dreams.

I was awakened soon after daybreak by a jemmoutdaar, or coloured sergeant, who came, attended by a couple of peons, to carry me before the Black Zemindar.

To this I immediately objected, as I had been given to understand that the Court of Cutcherry had no authority over Europeans, and was a supreme tribunal only for the subjects of the Mogul. The jemmoutdaar answered with the usual slavish stolidity of these people. He knew nothing except that he had been ordered to convey me before the Black Zemindar. In vain I remonstrated, and asked to see the captain, or one of the junior officers of my company. The jemmoutdaar was bent on executing his orders, which I afterwards discovered he had received from no one but my enemy, Sergeant-major O'Blagg, who enjoyed an extraordinary power in consequence of the prevailing supineness among his superiors.

I was taken to the Cutcherry, and there found myself accused of a murderous outrage upon my superior, with intent to do serious bodily harm; in proof of which, Sergeant O'Blagg showed the somewhat inflamed condition of one eye, which had suffered from the shower of rubbish I had discharged upon my enemy's head.

I had seen something of English courts during my brief residence in London, curiosity having led me to Westminster and the Old Bailey on more than one occasion; but although I had there beheld enough to shock my sense of the sacredness of justice, I was completely unprepared for the flagrant iniquity of a tribunal presided over by an almost irresponsible despot. Enough that I, a subject of His Britannic Majesty King George, was condemned to receive a hundred lashes at the hands of a Gentoo, whose national skill in the administration of this punishment I had heard and seen too much of. The Mahometan

abhors our British mode of capital punishment by the gallows, and hanging is therefore forbidden by the Mogul; but, on the other hand, the ruler of Delhi has no objection against his subjects being whipped to death, and the gentoo flagellant will lash his victim with a diabolical dexterity, the exhibition of which would have afforded a new sensation to Nero or Caligula.

The sentence was pronounced, and half-a-dozen black fellows advanced to lay their skinny paws upon my shoulders, in order to convey me to the compound, or open yard, behind the court, where summary justice was to be executed; but as they were in the very act of doing this the sound of a cannon booming across the Ganges arrested them as if spellbound, while a sudden unnatural stillness fell upon the court.

A Hindoo cooley entered in the next moment, and, prostrating himself slavishly before the Zemindar, informed him that a British vessel had arrived off Govindpore, and that Mr. Holwell had just landed, having come on to Fort William in a boat.

I had heard of this Mr. Holwell as a civil servant of some importance in the presidency. He had returned to England between two and three years before, there to end his days, as it was supposed, and nothing could have been more unexpected than his reappearance in Bengal.

My eyes happened to wander towards Govindram Metre at this moment, and never did I see terror more vividly painted upon the human countenance. That dusky change which is more ghastly than pallor spread itself over his copper-coloured visage; but the man was past-master of all dissimulative arts, and when Mr. Holwell himself, three minutes afterwards, came into the court-house, Govindram Metre received him with florid Oriental compliments and servile smiles.

The Englishman accepted these greetings with exemplary coldness.

"What are you doing here, Govindram?" he asked, looking at me; "and how comes a dispute between British soldiers to be submitted to the Cutcherry?"

"If it will please the most distinguished and favoured among the deputies of our honourable masters to hear the matter, he will perceive that it is a case of extraordinary character, which called for——"

"Not for your interference, Govindram," interrupted Mr. Holwell. "This young man is a military servant of the Company, and can only be punished in accordance with military law.—You ought to have known better, sergeant, than to bring your complaints here."

Mr. O'Blagg, whose importance shrivelled into nothing before this new arrival, muttered some excuse.

"Were they going to flog this young soldier?" asked Mr. Holwell.

The Gentoos assented; and Govindram Metre began a rambling justification of his proceedings.

"Upon my life, it is shameful!" cried Mr. Holwell indignantly. "But it is of a piece with all the rest. The president is absent at his country-house, and the five captains of the garrison are asleep under shelter of their mosquito-curtains, or away at their sports up the country, and this poor sick lad is brought hither in order that public justice may be prostituted to private malice. Why, the young man looks fitter for a sick-bed than the lash." And then, turning to me, he said, "You are free of this tribunal, but will have to answer to your captain for your offence against the Sergeant-major. Have you been ill?"

"I have been ill of a low fever for the last three weeks," I answered; "but they have made me work all the same, since I have just enough strength to crawl about under threat of the lash."

"You shall be put upon the sick-list. How long have you been in Bengal?"

"A year, sir. I was kidnapped by the Sergeant-major yonder."

"Kidnapped! Pshaw! There is no such thing as kidnapping allowed in the Honourable East India Company's service. You mean that you enlisted, and were sorry for it afterwards, and were held to your bond, as all recruits are."

"I mean that I was betrayed into a house in Fleet Lane, sir, and there detained close prisoner, in company with others, till we were shipped secretly, under cover of night, on board the *Hecate*. I mean that I could not have escaped from that crimping-house but at peril of my life, and that men have lost their lives in the attempt to escape from such houses."

"Humph!" muttered my new friend; "you speak as if you were telling truth. I know nothing of abuses in England. Abuses here are so many that the study and investigation of them would occupy a life as long as that of Nizam-al-Mulk, lately deceased at the venerable age of one hundred and four."

This was said with a somewhat ominous glance at Govindram Metre, who gazed upon the newly-arrived Englishman with upturned eyes, expressive of such veneration as he might be supposed to entertain only for the gods of his fathers.

"What is your name, young man?" asked Mr. Holwell.

"Robert Ainsleigh."

"Ainsleigh! That is a good name, and one I am bound to honour. From what branch of the Ainsleigh family do you come?"

"My father was Roderick Ainsleigh. My grandfather was a colonel of dragoons, who married Lord Hauteville's daughter, Lady Susan Somerton. I was brought up at Hauteville, in the county of Berks; entered at the Temple as a student, and intended for the law, when it was my ill fortune to fall in with that kidnapping scoundrel yonder."

"Not so fast, Mr. Ainsleigh. You must not call names

though you do come of a good English family, and a family that I have reason to respect. If what you tell me be true, I am in duty bound to befriend you; for your grandfather, Colonel Ainsleigh, served with my father in the low countries, and at the bloody battle of Malplaquet, carried him, then a lad, from under the enemy's batteries. So you see, sir, I have to thank your ancestor for my entrance into this world, since, had the French cannon made an end of Ensign Holwell on that famous occasion, there could be no such person as your humble servant.—What say you to this gentleman's story, Sergeant-major? Did he go by the name of Ainsleigh when you picked him up in London?"

"Sure he did, your honour; but devil a bit of an Ainsleigh is he for all that, but the baseborn son of Roderick Ainsleigh, a profligate scamp that got himself stabbed to death in a tavern quarrel; and my Lady Barbara Lestrangle, wife of His Majesty's plenipotentiary to Spain, adopted the young scoundrel and brought him up in charity, and he turned upon her like an ungrateful varmint as he is, and wanted to elope with Sir Marcus Lestrangle's niece—a great fortune, and a beauty into the bargain; but luckily for his family that he was nothing but a disgrace to, he enlisted himself to me in a drunken fit, whereby the Lestranges got rid of him."

"If you will let me tell you my story, sir, I think you will believe me," I said, addressing myself to Mr. Holwell.

"I think I shall, Mr. Robert Ainsleigh," he answered kindly. "Your face is hardly the countenance of a liar; and if the blood of my father's friend does but flow in your veins, I care little in what illegal manner you came by it."

"On my honour, sir, that fellow has no warrant for his foul assertion, except the one fact that the obscurity of my father's death and later days left me without the means of proving my legitimacy."

After this, Mr. Holwell ordered me to be placed on the sick list, and I was taken to a somewhat dilapidated building on the outskirts of the fort, that served as an infirmary.

"I will make it all right with your captain," he said; "and you, Mr. Sergeant-major, must look over the lad's delinquency on this occasion, to oblige me."

Mr. O'Blagg replied with extreme obsequiousness, and I began at once to discover what it is to have a friend at court.

The doctor pronounced me suffering from a low intermittent fever, and sorely in need of rest; so I lay at the infirmary for several weeks, during which Mr. Holwell frequently visited me. He questioned me very closely upon the subject of my education, and appeared much surprised to find me possessed of several languages, amongst these Sanscrit—which I owed to the scholarship of my old friend Anthony—and a tolerable proficient in Hindostanee the acquirement of which *visà voce*

from the native soldiery, and from such meagre books as I could obtain, had been my sole recreation during the last dreary year.

"Why, you are just such a fellow I want for a clerk and secretary," he said; "the young writers they send out are for the most part raw ignorant lads, who are despatched here only because their friends know not what to do with them at home. You have but to improve yourself in Hindoostanee, and to thoroughly master the native character in which their business documents are written, and you would be invaluable to me. Would you like to exchange the military for the civil service, if I could effect such a transfer?"

"To exchange the ignoble slavery I have endured here for your service would be to pass at once from the depths of Onderah to the Mahah Surgo; or, in plain English, to exchange hell for heaven."

"I see you have been studying the Shastah," said Mr. Holwell, who had already revealed to me that taste for Oriental research which was afterwards usefully displayed in his numerous pamphlets. "You cannot do better than pursue such studies, for the Gentoos will respect you so much the more for being acquainted with the Sanscrit language, the knowledge of which is confined to their Brahmins and learned Pundits. And you would really like to be my secretary, Robert?"

"Nothing would please me better."

"I warn you that the work will be of the hardest, and tax your powers of accountancy. I am now engaged in the investigation of a series of frauds committed by that scoundrel, Govindram Metre, which involve the conduct of our finances for the last ten years, and by which that black rascal has pocketed thousands. Do you feel yourself capable of performing the mere mechanical drudgery of such a work?"

"I feel myself capable of making any endeavour to serve you, sir. I was well drilled into accountancy by my lady's house-steward, who had an old-fashioned veneration for figures; and with a little direction from yourself, I doubt not I should soon master the mysteries of finance."

Mr. Holwell was contented with this assurance, and set to work immediately to redeem me from my hateful bondage. He was a person of considerable influence in the presidency; and amongst a supine and indifferent community his industrious and energetic habits multiplied that influence tenfold. So, by the time I was sufficiently recovered to leave the infirmary I found myself a free man, and went immediately to Mr. Holwell's house, where I was provided with suitable clothes, a decent chamber, and began life for the second time in the character of a gentleman.

It is not to be supposed I was so base as to forget my companion in misery, Philip Hay, in this happy alteration of my own fate. I tried to enlist Mr. Holwell's sympathy for that reckless scoundrel, and carefully suppressed his share in my betrayal.

My new friend promised to do his best to serve my late brother in arms; but he remarked that Mr. Hay bore his lot with supreme equanimity, and was a fellow who would doubtless fall on his feet, tumble from what pinnacle he might.

"We may have some fighting by-and-by," said he; "for at the first hint of a war between the two countries Dupleix will be down upon us here. It is not to be supposed that the French will let us alone for ever after their good luck at Madras. In the event of an attack upon this place, your friend will have an opportunity of distinguishing himself; and be sure the fight will be a desperate one, for while I have a voice to raise in council, the motto of Fort William shall be no surrender."

I lived to see this promise kept, and against a more cruel foe than the French. I lived to witness the base abandonment of Fort William by its chief military protectors, and its heroic defence by a civilian.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### MR. OMICHUND, THE COMPANY'S AGENT.

I BEGAN my labours as clerk, or secretary, to Mr. Holwell, with a hearty desire to render good service to the one friend I had found on this far foreign shore, and entered at once into the entangled mass of accounts it was my duty to examine.

The Zemindarship is an office of double duties, and involves two separate functions, distinct and almost wholly independent of each other. The Zemindar is not only a judge of the Court of Cutcherry, but he is also superintendent and collector of the East India Company's revenues; and it was in this latter capacity that Govindram Metre, in his post of standing deputy, had enjoyed ample opportunity of amassing a fortune at the Company's expense.

The rapid rotation of the English Zemindarship, which office changed hands two or three times in twelve months, had thrown all the power into this fellow's hands; since the superior officer, whose deputy he was, had no time to learn the details of his office, and little inclination to enter laboriously into the duties of a position he was to hold for so brief a period. Mr. Holwell's suspicion of this man's integrity had been aroused before his voyage to England, while the attention of the Court of Directors had also been drawn to sundry depredations and abuses committed by this official. At the request of the court, Mr. Holwell had taken pains to explain the nature of the Zemindarship to the ruling powers at home, and he now returned invested with full authority as Zemindar, and not to be removed from his office without express orders from England, since no proper investigation of the deputy's abuses could be possible

while the head office fluctuated by rotation as heretofore. Once invested with full powers, Mr. Holwell spared no labour in his task of cleansing this Angean stable of foul accountancy.

It would be but dry work to enter into the details of Govindram Metre's defalcations. Nothing could be more iniquitous than his system of embezzlement; and while the office of Head Zemindar had been a fluctuating one, nothing could be less liable to detection, since not one of the natives, from the highest to the lowest, durst with impunity have given umbrage to him, and 'tis they who alone could have explored the dark and intricate mazes in which he had so long concealed his operations from the eye of justice.

Amongst his other functions it was his duty to dispose of the pottahs or leases, which apportioned the Company's farms for the space of one year. These pottahs should have been disposed of by public outcry or auction in the Cutcherry, in the presence of the Zemindar; but instead of being thus offered to public competition, the farms were sold privately at Govindram Metre's own house, at such prices as he choose to assign to them. All the best of these he bought himself, under fictitious names, and immediately resold at a profit of from forty to sixty per cent. This infamous transaction, repeated annually for ten years, and involving several estates, had alone enabled him to amass a large fortune; but this was only one species of fraud amongst many. On the monthly charge of servants, on charges for repairing the Cutcherries or court-houses, for repairing roads, and on other items, this knavish rascal's embezzlements amounted to thousands.

Govindram Metre's summary dismissal from his too profitable office was an act of Mr. Holwell's in which the Court of Directors at home promptly concurred; but the investigation of frauds so complicated, and the exposure of a system of plunder as artful as it was infamous, was a work of years. To discover the Black Zemindar's embezzlements was one thing, to prove them was another and far more arduous labour. Every obstacle by which the genius of dishonesty could hinder the progress of justice was placed in our way by this arch-plunderer. A complete retrospective examination of his accounts was impossible, for we were politely informed that the white ants had destroyed some of his papers, while others had been washed away in a great storm. In spite of all opposition on the part of the culprit and his slavish instruments, Mr. Holwell did, however, contrive to lay before the Directors a detailed statement of the frauds to which their property had been subject; while the immediate and remarkable augmentation of the revenues under his charge fully proved that his discoveries were of no hypothetical character. It was reserved for this gentleman in the future to prove how small is the

gratitude of princes, or of companies, and to drink to the dregs that cup of neglect so frequently offered to the lips of the faithful public servant.

Before I had been many months an inmate of Mr. Holwell's house, I had the satisfaction of finding that my services were of real value to this kind friend and master. He honoured me with much confidence; and I, for my part, told him my own story without the smallest reservation, save on the one subject of Phil Hay's treachery. Meanwhile, although our life at Calcutta was monotony itself, stirring events were taking place elsewhere; and Major Lawrence, with his brave young subordinate, Robert Clive, was teaching Dupleix that French ambition was not to be for ever unopposed by British enterprise.\*

My patron's own numerous duties and high responsibilities kept him employed during all the working hours of the day, and during many weary hours in which no one but himself would have cared to work; while I, stimulated by his example, laboured as unremittingly in my own humbler function. Nor did I confine myself to a clerk's drudgery, for I had taken to heart Mr. Holwell's remarks on the importance of an acquaintance with the native language, and I devoted a great deal of my spare time to the study of Persian, Hindostanee, and the vulgar Bengalee, under the tuition of a mild-faced moonshee, who came to my quarters nightly to instruct me in those tongues. With this learned man I read the original Shastah, and its more modern and corrupt versions, and thus became familiar with the theogony of Hindostan, between which and the Greek system, as recorded by Hesiod, I did not fail to find occasional coincidences. It was, indeed, to hard mental labour that I could alone look for distraction from the painful reflections which oppressed me in this early period of my exile. I had now been a year and a half in Bengal, but had received no letter from England, though I had written three times to my benefactress, in each several letter setting forth my griefs with all the persistence of despair. Immediately after my removal from the garrison, I had taken advantage of my liberty to write and despatch two other letters. The first to Mr. Swinfen, of the Temple, to whom I related my sad story in its fullest details, and whom I entreated to take possession of the books and other property I had left in my chambers, amongst which was the Spanish translation of the *Imitation of Christ*, given to me by Dorothea Hemsey. I did not, of course, fail to inform Mr. Swinfen how kind a friend I had found in Mr. Holwell; nor did I omit to ask his advice upon the legality of my shameful marriage. My second letter was addressed to my old guardian and tutor, Anthony Grimshaw, in whom I scarce doubted I yet possessed a friend, however foully I might have been slandered in his hearing. From him I en-

\* See Appendix, Note B.



treated tidings of those I so fondly loved, and so cruelly had lost. To him also I gave a full account of my adventures, for I was determined that if my wrongs could be righted, the opportunity of righting them should not be lost by any omission on my part.

Having done this I felt somewhat easier in my mind, and better able to devote myself to my daily labours. That was for me a most favourable hour in which my grandfather, Colonel Ainsleigh, had the good fortune to rescue Mr. Holwell's father from the enemy's fire, for I found in this gentleman a constant and affectionate friend. Amply did he repay the debt which he owed my ancestor. He rescued me from a living death, far worse than the swift annihilation of a cannon-ball, and taught me to hope when every circumstance of my life tempted me to despair.

"Your moonshee gives me a most glowing account of your progress, Bob," he said to me one day, after I had been six months an inhabitant of his house. "That old bookworm house-steward of whom you tell me, seems to have grounded you admirably in Sanscrit, and you have, I think, a natural talent for languages. Rely on it, that a familiarity with the native tongues is the safest stepping-stone to success in this country, and the young Englishmen who neglect such studies are stone-blind to their own interests. Dupleix has profited greatly by the assistance of his Creole wife, who was born and educated in Bengal, and whose familiarity with the language and usages of the people, to say nothing of her natural talent for diplomacy, has enabled her to aid and abet him in all his Oriental intrigues. The day will perhaps come when you will have reason to bless Providence for your forced voyage to the East. The stagnation of affairs in this presidency is but a false calm. Be sure we shall have stirring scenes enough by-and-by, and a hard fight to hold our own. But whatever struggles await us, I hope everything from the English spirit when once fairly aroused. The British lion is a beast that sleeps long and soundly, but God help his enemies in the hour of his awakening! The French have been for a long time past trying to show us the road to glory, and I think young Clive is beginning to show them that we are capable of learning the lesson. And now, Robert, I want you to put aside your respectable moonshee for to-night, and come with me to a festival that is to be given by our friend and ally, Mr. Omichund, a Gentoo merchant, and one of the most remarkable men in this country."

"I shall be proud to accompany you, sir: but, pray, in what does Mr. Omichund's chief merit or genius consist?"

"Why, faith, Bob, if the truth must be told, I think his chief gift is that which most rapidly wins a man distinction at home, in our native country, as well as among these unenlightened heathens. He has the true Gentoo genius for money-making, and for the last forty years has devoted all the forces of his

mind to that pursuit. Our Company has allowed him to provide more of our investments than any other contractor, and by this indulgence on our part—which is against our own rules—and sundry other privileges, he has become the richest man in the colony. His trade extends to the uttermost limits of Bengal and Behar, and his influence with the officers of Alla-verdy's court at Muxadavad is so considerable, that we sometimes stoop to employ him as our mediator when we want to get the ear of the Nabob. Not a very honourable position for John Company, is it, Bob? But I live in hope the day will come when John will no longer prostrate himself with eight members before the Mahometan musnud; but will stand erect and defend his hardly-won privileges at the point of the sword. In the meantime we are about to make a serious change in our trading arrangements, and to retrench Mr. Omichund's privileges in a manner which will, I fear, sorely vex that pious Gentoo's soul. Yet it is but one of the trials which he has a right to expect in this ninth stage of purgation. The truth of the matter is, that we have discovered a very serious decline in the qualities of the merchandise provided by his agency, together with as serious an advance in its price. But the man is useful, and it would be a dangerous thing for us to offend him, for which reason I have accepted his invitation to to-night's natch. Nothing gratifies these people more than the presence of Europeans at their festivals."

We were carried to Omichund's house in palanquins. Calcutta, when I first knew it, had been in existence less than fifty years, and was but a sorry assemblage of bamboo huts and the curious open shops of the natives, interspersed with occasional large and sometimes handsome houses belonging to Armenian, native, and English merchants; while here and there an insignificant building of painted brick and plaster, surmounted by three small domes, proclaimed itself the temple of the Mahometan faith; but how different from the pompous mosque of St. Sophia, or the Jumma Musleed (chief cathedral) of Delhi, with its rich blending of dark-red sandstone and pure white marble! At the corner of a road we passed a mean and dirty house, round which a crowd of natives were clamouring, with angry gesticulations and frantic cries. This, Mr. Holwell pointed out to me as the Catwallee, a minor police-court, where petty grievances are redressed, and a kind of rough-and-ready justice administered.

We arrived presently at the Gentoo merchant's house, a handsomer edifice than I had yet seen, and brilliantly illuminated. A mixed crowd of guests and lookers-on was congregated at the gates, through which we pushed our way into a spacious hall or quadrangular court, occupying the centre of the house, and surrounded by two galleries with innumerable

doors opening into small apartments. The upper story Mr. Holwell pointed out to me as devoted to the women of the household, who, although invisible to us, were watching the entertainment from the covert of their Venetian lattices. I had afterwards good reason to remember this upper story, and one of its beautiful inhabitants.

The court, which, like a Sevillian patio, is at ordinary times open to the sky, was for this occasion roofed in with red cloth, and lighted with countless lamps. The white-muslin draperies and rich embroidered costumes of the guests; the necklaces and aigrettes of rainbow-tinted gems, that flashed in strange contrast to their tawny skins, and shone only less brightly than their piercing black eyes; the crowd of servants, of whom my companion informed me Mr. Omichund possessed three hundred, and who were augmented by the retainers brought by his visitors; the buzzing of many tongues, the confusion of perpetual movement, and the curious inharmonious native music,—combined to render the scene one of dazzling bewilderment to my unaccustomed senses. This was indeed an introduction to fairyland, and its novelty, for the moment, carried me completely out of myself.

Now began the amusement of the evening. A band of public dancing-girls advanced into the centre of the hall, and performed a strange barbaric dance, which had in it few elements of European dancing. Nothing did I ever behold so devoid of loveliness, for while the arms, body, and head were exercised in every variety of contortion, the feet, though constantly moving, never stirred from the same spot. Whatever dramatic story might be told by the performance—and the changeful expression of the dancers' countenances seemed to have some dramatic significance—was beyond my humble faculties, and if it was by such strained movements and monotonous posturings that the daughter of Herodias danced St. John the Baptist's head off his shoulders, I can but deprecate the bad taste of Herod as much as I abhor his cruelty. Both Mr. Holwell and myself grew heartily weary of this exhibition, during which we discovered that the splendour of Omichund's palace did not exempt us from the native scourge of mosquitoes, which venomous insect tormented us throughout the evening.

Immediately upon the conclusion of the dance, the great Gentoo merchant espied us, and advanced to welcome Mr. Holwell with demonstrative respect. They talked together for some time in Hindostanee, and I had ample leisure in which to observe Mr. Omichund. He was a man of advanced years, forty of which he had spent in the harassing pursuit of wealth. Time thus employed had left its traces upon a countenance that had once been handsome, and which was of the most refined native type. But in the expression of that countenance I real

only evil. A crafty nature had set its seal upon every feature of the Gentoo's face. While the flexible mouth expressed only meekness and submission, the restlessness of the observant eyes belied its amiable tranquillity; and in those bright and watchful orbs I fancied I could discover a latent fierceness that augured ill for Mr. Omichund's enemies.

He had evidently got wind of the discussions respecting him that had taken place in council, and of the intention to reduce his privileges, and it was with reference to this that he shaped his conversation to-night.

"I have been a faithful servant to the Honourable Company, Mr. Sahib Holwell," he said, "and have stood between my honourable masters and the Nabob's anger many times. The English do not know the Nabob as Omichund knows him. These Mahometans are all false; they are false as lies. With one hand they will sign a treaty, while with the other they invoke Allah's vengeance on the party to the bond. Do not let the Honourable Company trust the Nabob unless they have a friend at the Durbar—an Indian like Omichund, who has spent his life among these Mahometans and knows how to deal with them. The Honourable Company have hidden enemies at the Durbar. The French governor, Dupleix, is very powerful—O, he is great and powerful, like the old Nizam, and has a head like him to plot and plan. Governor Dupleix and Jan Begum, his wife, have their spies everywhere. She writes many letters—clever letters—that win friends for Dupleix and the French; for she knows these Mahometans, but not as Omichund knows them. She has not had forty years of dealings with them, as he has. The French are better liked in Bengal than the English; and if the Honourable Company does not keep a friend at the Durbar, there will be danger, much danger."

"From what quarter, Omichund?" asked Mr. Holwell quietly.

"From the French, from the old Nabob, and still more from his grand-nephew, Mirza Mahmud, who will succeed him, and who hates the English. He has the heart of a tiger, that young man, with the courage of a rat, and he loves only evil. Let the Honourable Company trust Omichund, and he will by-and-by show them wonderful things and gain them great friends. It is not so sure that Mirza Mahmud shall succeed to the musnud."

"Indeed! And who is the pretender?"

"It is too soon to tell you that. Omichund knows many secrets, and has much power. It will be well for the Honourable Company if they treat him generously. But if they rob me of hard-won privileges—nay, Sahib, I am not the man to threaten," said the merchant, checking himself suddenly, but with an ominous light in his eyes that was in itself a threat.

"I know that Omichund also has enemies," he went on, in a more tranquil tone, "enemies who grudge him the wealth he has

earned by prudence and unremitting toil and faithful service to his honourable masters; and those slanderous tongues would do him evil with the honourable council. But his honourable masters are too wise to listen to such base whisperers. They know they have a good friend in Omichund."

To this, and much more to the same effect, did Mr. Holwell listen with that inscrutable calm which was one of his finest gifts. He had indeed a rare aptitude for business, and a genius for coping with the difficulties and niceties of a perplexing position.

"I am but an insignificant member of the council, Omichund," he said at last, "and have little power to influence its decisions. Rely upon it the Company are grateful for all faithful service, and in anything they may do will be influenced only by conscientious motives. But let me not detain you too long from your Gentoo friends, who will be ill-pleased if you devote all your attention to a single English guest."

On this our host quitted us, but not without many obeisances and Oriental compliments.

"The old fox has been informed of our intentions with regard to him," Mr. Holwell observed to me when Omichund had left us, "and I suspect he means mischief. Nothing could be more unwise than to employ him as we have employed him, except this culminating folly of diminishing his privileges. We suffer the man to become possessed of inordinate power, and choose the moment when he is strongest to offer him mortal offences. Upon my word Robert, this management of affairs in Bengal is about the prettiest comedy of errors that was ever enacted."

The time came, and but too speedily, when Mr. Holwell had occasion to denominated the mismanaged business of Calcutta a tragedy, and not a comedy, of errors.

Before he could say more to me, we were escorted to the supper-room, where we found ourselves placed at one of the highest tables, to partake of a sumptuous banquet, amid the hubbub of some five hundred attendants and the barbaric discords of Hindoo music.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### BAD NEWS FROM HOME.

Not many weeks after my attendance at Omichund's ratch, the English mail brought me a packet of direful news which made me for a long time indifferent to public affairs, and only able to perform my daily duties in the dulllest manner. To the arrival of every British ship I had for more than a year looked forward with passionate hope and expectation, and behold at last the white sail came that was to bring me, not solace, but the final agony of despair—the *coup de grâce* that was to end all the weak

struggles of my heart with the annihilation of my last hope. In Lady Barbara's affection I had trusted as in a strong rock of defence from the assaults of affliction. Had she not told me that she would be my friend through all the changes of my life, and that even ill-conduct on my part should not cancel her regard for her dead lover's orphan son? During the last two bitter years the memory of this promise had been my chief comfort; and again and again when the arrival of the English vessel had brought me only disappointment, I had said to myself, "I will wait. I know that this one friend is true to me, and sooner or later I shall receive some proof of her affection."

I think I could have existed for years buoyed up by this one hope, but even this was taken from me.

Of the three letters which I so anxiously expected, one only came to me, and that was addressed by the hand of Mr. Swinfen. With the letter came a packet, which I found to contain two numbers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and while tearing open the cover of the letter I had time to wonder why he had sent me these. Alas! I but too soon learned his motive.

Mr. Swinfen's letter ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR MR. AINSLEIGH,—I was at once surprised and shocked by the contents of your letter (per ship *Godolphin*, arrived January 4th, 1753) and the shameful infringement of an Englishman's liberty therein described; but find myself unhappily powerless to redress your wrongs. The system by which you have suffered is an infamous adaptation of the tactics of the press-gang to the East India Company's service, and I doubt not is an abuse that will continue to flourish, in spite of complaint from its victims. I bade one of my clerks copy the story of your capture—of course carefully suppressing all private details—and sent exemplars to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and another journal, but could not obtain either editors' consent to its insertion. The Directors of the E. I. Company are numerous and wealthy, and these slavish journalists do not care to offend so influential a body. There will, I hope, come a day when the English press will be more enlightened, and a British subject may find a prompt hearing, if not a swift redress for his wrongs.

"Were your present state as pitiable as the condition in which you found yourself on first arriving at Bengal, I should be inclined to move heaven and earth in the endeavour to procure your release and return to England. But in all candour, I declare that, to my mind, your position at Calcutta, as the confidential secretary of an influential person such as Mr. Holwell is far superior to any standing you could hope to obtain at home. Pray cherish this new patron and benefactor whom a kind Providence has raised up for you in a land of strangers, and endeavour by your faithful service to become at once necessary and valuable to him.

"And now, alas! my dear young friend, I come to the saddest part of my duty, on the performance whereof I enter with a pain second only to that which I know the perusal of this letter will inflict upon you. A heavy loss and affliction has befallen a distinguished English family, and has at the same time deprived you of an affectionate and powerful friend. I will not enter upon details which you will find related at large in the obituary of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December last past, I will tell you only that your kinswoman, Lady Barbara Lestrangle, is no more, having expired of a ruptured blood-vessel within a month after the marriage of her step-son, Mr. Everard Lestrangle, to his cousin, Miss Hemsley.

"You will perhaps wonder that so kind a friend as Lady Barbara should have made no testamentary arrangement in your behalf, since her estate was large and I believe subject to her testamentary control. Having adopted you in infancy, she might naturally desire to extend her care of you beyond the grave, so far at least as to secure your manhood from poverty.

"I can only account for this omission from the fact that the lamented lady was cut off suddenly, in the very prime of womanhood, and that women are ever slow to consider the necessity of legal preparation for that uncertain hour which cometh as a thief in the night. The dear lady left no will, and her estate thus devolves entirely upon her husband, Sir Marcus Lestrangle, no doubt to the ultimate enrichment of his only son. It is but a new example of that common fate by which one Pactolean stream flows into and augments another, leaving the barren plains of earth unfertilized.

"Lastly, my dear friend, let me reply to your anxious inquiries on the subject of your unhappy marriage. I regret to say that you have been rightly informed: a marriage so contracted is valid, and nothing but death can loosen your bonds. You will see in this fact another reason for your prolonged residence in India, by which you escape all the pains and penalties of your position.

"I have taken measures to secure the books and other property left at your chambers, and will cause them to be forwarded to you at Calcutta on receipt of your letter to that effect. My paper will permit me to say no more than that I am

"Your obedient servant and sincere well-wisher, H. SWINFEN.

"TEMPLE,

"January 30th, 1753."

I lay for hours stretched upon the floor of my chamber, with Mr. Swinfen's letter crushed in my clenched hand, sobbing like a child. And I had thought that evil fortune had shot *all* her arrows at my devoted head, while *this* envenomed dart yet remained in her quiver!

It was dark when I rose from the ground, remembering that

I had yet to learn the details of my affliction. I groped for a lamp, and having lighted it, seated myself at my desk, and began to examine the magazines Mr. Swinfen had sent me.

In the record of marriages printed in the number for November, now ten months past, I speedily found the following passage, marked in the margin by the sender:—

“On Tuesday, 11th inst., was solemnized, with much splendour, the marriage of Mr. Everard Lestrangle, only son and heir to Sir Marcus Lestrangle, of St. James’s Square, London, and Hauteville, Berks (late plenipotentiary to his Britannic Majesty at the Court of Madrid), to Miss Dorothea Hemsley, a young lady of fortune, whose beauty and numerous charms of manner and accomplishment have attracted much attention both at court and in the upper circles during the last two seasons. Several of the most distinguished members of the Ministry were present at the ceremonial; and the amiable prime minister himself honoured the occasion by his presence. The bride and bridegroom are to pass the fortnight immediately succeeding their union at Thorpstone, in Yorkshire, the seat of a member of Sir Marcus Lestrangle’s family. It is pleasant to record a marriage which in its auspicious circumstances recalls the experience of Arcadian fairy-tale rather than the harsher precedents of common life. The union of Mr. Lestrangle and his fair cousin is a pure love-match, the young people having grown up together in a tender and most perfect sympathy of inclinations and sentiments, under the approving eyes of their kindred. A violent fit of hysterics which overtook the bride at the conclusion of the ceremony testified to the intensity of her emotion. Mr. Lestrangle is designed for a diplomatic career, and will, we believe, be the bearer of despatches to her Imperial Highness the Empress of Russia, with a view to the more satisfactory adjustment of the late subsidiary treaty, for which distinguished mission his elegant manners and agreeable face and figure eminently adapt him.”

To me what a satire lurked beneath the hackneyed scribbler’s florid paragraph! Love, sympathy!—yes, such love and sympathy as can exist between the tender lamb and its devourer the wolf; between the helpless transfixed bird and its fatal fascinator the snake.

Amongst the obituary notices in the December number of the same magazine appeared a paragraph of more tragic interest:—

“LADY BARBARA LESTRANGE, only daughter and sole heiress of the late Earl Hauteville, and wife of Sir Marcus Lestrangle, late plenipotentiary to the court of Madrid. It is with heartfelt regret that we record the decease of this lady, who expired on Friday, November 19th, at her husband’s mansion in St. James’s Square. Her death was awfully sudden, and occasioned by the



rupture of a blood-vessel; but Lady Barbara Lestrangle's health had for some months given cause of alarm to her friends. She had but sufficient time to bid a hurried farewell to her family, the principal members of which, namely, Sir Marcus Lestrangle, his son Mr. Lestrangle, and his amiable lady, were with her at the time of the sad event. Lady Barbara Lestrangle was born in 1712, and was therefore only forty years of age at the time of her lamented decease. She was remarkable for her beauty among the belles of His Majesty's Court some twenty years ago; and was distinguished during a long residence at Madrid for the urbanity of her manners, the charm of her conversation, and the unaffected piety of her life. *Nascentes Morimur, finisque ab origine pendet.*"

In another part of the same magazine I found the notice of an event which accounted but too sadly 'or the failure of any reply to my letter from my old friend, Anthony Grimshaw.

*"Burglary and murderous Outrage at Hauteville, Berks, the Seat of the late Lady Barbara Lestrangle."*

"On Saturday, the 20th November, a frightful outrage was committed by a gang of ruffians upon the person of Mr. Grimshaw, house-steward in the employment of Sir Marcus Lestrangle, who narrowly escaped with his life from their brutal assaults. A party of three masked robbers broke into the noble mansion of Hauteville between eleven and twelve at night, no doubt with evil intent upon the plate-room, which is situated in a store vault under the hall. They seem, however, to have made their entry at an upper window, as it was in an apartment on the first floor—the morning-room of Lady Barbara Lestrangle—that Mr. Grimshaw appears to have encountered them. What occurred between the armed ruffians and this unfortunate gentleman is known but to himself, and he is in no condition to relate the circumstances of the encounter. But there are ample evidences that the struggle was a desperate one. A valuable Chinese cabinet of inlaid ebony and ivory was found shattered into a thousand pieces, while the steward lay to all appearance lifeless beside it, his skull cruelly battered by some blunt instrument. The villains contrived to escape by leaping from the window to a terrace below, unperceived save by a frightened housemaid, who, not having seen their faces, has no power to describe or identify them. They were happily disappointed of their hopes of booty, nothing being missed except a tray of antique coins from the broken cabinet, where the burglars no doubt hoped to discover valuable jewels, or they would scarcely have made this their first point of attack. Some faint hopes of Mr. Grimshaw's life are entertained, but it is considered doubtful if he will ever recover his faculties, as the injuries done are likely to exercise a permanent ill-effect upon the brain.

"This event happened, by a strange coincidence, within four-and-twenty hours after the sudden death of Lady Barbara Lestrangle, to whom the mansion and estate of Hauteville belonged in her own right, and from whom this noble property devolves to her husband and sole heir, Sir Marcus Lestrangle, the lamented lady having died intestate."

"A strange coincidence," I repeated, brooding over this passage in the report. "Was this midnight attack upon my lady's private room no more than a coincidence? I have heard her say that she kept family papers in that very cabinet; and before she is cold in her coffin that cabinet is broken open by masked ruffians, who go near to murder her most faithful servant and my only friend. And my benefactress dies intestate, without care or thought for the orphan youth she had adopted; she, whose carefulness for others revealed itself in the smallest things. O God! it is a strange and wicked world; and I know not whether the treachery of Mahometan revolutionaries in this Eastern hemisphere is much darker than the plots and stratagems of so-called Christians at home!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE BOLT ABOUT TO FALL.

WERE this a record of private griefs, I might dwell long upon the desolation of spirit and unutterable anguish of heart which followed the receipt of those tidings that gave the death-blow to all my hopes; and, Heaven knows, these had seemed faint and feeble enough since my cruel marriage and more cruel exile. I had lost all. Henceforth nothing was left me in the past; and I looked forward to the unknown future from a present stand-point as desolate as it is possible for the mind of man to conceive.

Yet, as I pen these lines, and recall the dull despair of those days, I think with shame of my ingratitude to the one friend whom God had raised up for me in this unknown world, and my impious forgetfulness of the mercy that had secured me so kind and powerful a protector. If my situation was desolate in spite of Mr. Holwell's friendship, what would my state have been without that supreme advantage? By this gentleman I had been rescued from a crew of wretches, who were, for the most part, the very refuse and sweepings of English gaols, and elevated to a position of companionship. The friendship of so respectable a gentleman won for me other acquaintances, and I soon occupied an established position amongst the gentlemen of the factory. Of the life which these gentlemen and their families enjoyed I will say nothing, save that to them it seemed a pleasant one. My own troubles unfitted me for such agreeable dissipation as prevailed among them, and I preferred the solitud

of my office to the most boisterous dinner-party in Calcutta. The day came when the tragic and exciting incidents of public life blunted the keen edge of individual sorrow, and I was better able to appreciate the advantages I had derived from the happy chance that threw me across Mr. Holwell's pathway. But for more than a year after my receipt of Mr. Swinfen's letter I was able to take comfort from nothing; and though I still performed my daily round of duty, and contrived to give satisfaction to my employer, the pleasure and interest which I had hitherto felt in my work had completely left me.

The years which elapsed between the autumn of 1753 and the summer of '56 were years of comparative tranquillity; and before that memorable summer came, we had seen the reduction of French power in the East by means of French folly, cowardice, and ignorance in the West. Enemy to my country though he was, false as he had shown himself in his violation of the treaty of Madras, I cannot withhold my pity from that daring and ambitious statesman, Joseph Francis Dupleix, when I consider the ignoble treatment he received from the government he had served so well.

While the rival powers on the coast of Coromandel were fighting for the supremacy of their chosen native rulers, and disputing the validity of titles and grants given by the shadowy court of Delhi, where the Mogul himself was but a usurper of very recent date, the English Company at home pestered the Government with complaints that, despite a treaty of peace between the two nations, they were harassed by a distressing and dangerous war, produced by the ambition of the French governor. Nor were the French themselves better satisfied with the conduct of their Indian affairs. Too remote from the seat of war to be affected by the glories of success, they considered only the expense and loss entailed by those triumphs, and were unable to appreciate the future advantages which those struggles were intended to secure. Dupleix was too successful a man to be without enemies. These accused him of wasting the French Company's money upon ambitious wars; and France, after leaving this bold and faithful servant, inefficiently supported, to extend her dominions and maintain her army by the outlay of his private fortune, determined upon repudiating his claim of repayment and breaking him altogether.

At a conference which took place in London between the representatives of the French and British Governments, the French Ministry consented to recall Dupleix, and to send commissioners to India for the settlement of all differences between the two nations. Thus it happened that Monsieur Godcheu, a stranger to affairs in the East, was permitted to supersede the man who had first taught Moorish power to bow before European arms, and who had won for his country a name of might

throughout the length and breadth of the Deccan. Injustice so glaring was second only to that which had flung De la Bourdonnais into a cell of the Bastille; and I doubt not that in the hour of his own misfortunes the Governor of Pondicherry remembered his underhand share in the downfall of his blameless rival.

Negotiations between M. Godcheu and Mr. Saunders, the English Governor of Madras, resulted in extraordinary concessions on the part of the French. That nation, thanks to the ambition of Dupleix and the prowess of Bussy, were now masters of the sea-coast of Coromandel and Orixá; but this advantage, together with many others, was precipitately resigned by the French Company in the general desire for peace.

While evil fortune thus overtook Dupleix, his happier enemy, Clive, was in London, fêted by an admiring public, and gratified by the gift of a diamond-hilted sword, worth five hundred pounds, from the Court of Directors, which, however, he generously refused to receive unless a testimonial of equal value were presented to his friend and commanding officer, Colonel Lawrence, to whose liberal encouragement he owed so much of his success.

In the November of '55, the hero of Arcot returned to India as Governor of Fort St. David, bearing a commission as lieutenant-colonel in the British army, which had been obtained for him from His Majesty's Government by the Court of Directors, anxious to prevent those quarrels about rank between the King's and Company's officers which had so often obstructed the progress of affairs.

Instead of at once proceeding to his new Government, Colonel Clive landed at Bombay, where he found Admiral Watson and a little fleet, which had been prudently despatched from England at the time of the conference between the French and English Companies. Assisted by the Admiral, Clive attacked and routed a famous pirate, called Angria, who, with his father before him, had been the scourge and terror of this coast for the last half century. This Morattoo rascal's stronghold of Gheria Colonel Clive razed to the ground on the 13th of February, '56, on which occasion the British forces shared ten lacs of rupees by way of plunder.

This was the last event of importance on the western coast before the revolution which overtook Bengal. Here a false security, or rather, perhaps, an habitual distaste for action or exertion of any kind, on the part of the chief authorities, civil and military, had prevailed ever since the fear of Morattoo invasion had ceased to alarm the native and English inhabitants of the settlement. Every species of neglect had been practised. The defences of fort and city were in a dilapidated and almost useless condition. In all the arsenal there was scarce a carriage that would bear a gun; while fifty-five cannon, eighteen- and twenty-four-pounders, sent out from England in '53, had lain ever since neglected beneath the walls. Nor had the orders of

the Directors at home been better attended to with regard to the drilling and military training of the militia. These, though entirely untaught, were hardly more ignorant than the meagre garrison, not one in ten among whom had ever seen a musket fired in earnest.

This was our condition at Fort William when the tidings of Allaverdy's approaching death came upon us. The spirit of the grand old Tartar chief was fading out amidst a scene of intrigue and treachery—the last act in that drama of falsehood and ambition which is for ever being enacted in this Eastern world.

On the one side, Allaverdy's dying eyes beheld his beloved grand-nephew, Mirza Mahmud, the adopted child of his old age, dear to him as an only son, and whom he had installed as his successor two years before, with the Moorish name of Serauje-ad-Doulah, or the Lamp of Riches; who was afterwards known as Suraja Doulah, by which title he made himself infamously renowned to all time. On the other side, the deathbed of the old Nabob was watched by his daughter—a woman of more than doubtful character, who had been married to her cousin, Shawamut Jung, and was now a childless widow.\*

There now remained but one possible pretender to the sovereignty of Bengal, and this was a child of two years old, the orphan son of Suraja Doulah's younger brother. This infant's father had been adopted by the late Shawamut Jung, and the baby pretender was now in the hands of Allaverdy's daughter, the Begum, who had succeeded to her husband's treasures, and towards whom Suraja Doulah looked with the eye of hate and suspicion.

The person who exercised most influence over the Begum was a Gentoo called Rajah Bullub, who had been Duan, or prime minister, to her husband. Suraja Doulah had given this man a taste of his quality, having seized upon him, and, by imprisonment and other cruelties, endeavoured to force from him a full account of Shawamut Jung's treasures. This the faithful Gentoo resolutely refused, and was by-and-by set at liberty by the influence of his mistress, who, as Allaverdy's daughter, had some power at court.

Thus did matters stand at Muxadavad, the capital of Bengal,† when the imminence of the Nabob's end brought affairs to a crisis. Raja Bullub, trembling for the safety of his treasures at Dacca, determined to remove with his worldly wealth and his family to a place of safety. But to effect this he was obliged to screen his real motives under a pretended access of piety. He therefore wrote to Mr. Watts, the chief of our English factory at Cassimbazar, hard by Muxadavad, informing him that his family were going from Dacca to worship at Juggernaut, and would take Calcutta on their way, at which settlement he entreated their favourable reception.

\* See Appendix, Note B      † Now called Mo orainedabad.

In compliance with this request Mr. Watts wrote to our president at Calcutta, and to Mr. Manningham, his junior in command. These letters arrived on the evening of the 13th of March, and during the absence of the president. They had but just reached Calcutta when Kissendass, the eldest son of Raja Bullub, and the rest of the family, landed from the little fleet of boats that had conveyed them from Dacca. There was brief leisure for consideration, and the travellers were received with all possible courtesy.

Mr. Holwell shook his head doubtfully when his people brought him the news of this unexpected arrival, as he and I lounged in an open veranda in the cool of the evening.

"I don't like such visitors, Bob," he said gravely; "and yet I own it would be awkward to refuse them hospitality. In Oriental politics it is hard to know what turn events may take. If the Begum, Shawamut Jung's widow, should succeed in getting her adopted brat proclaimed Nabob—and we know that Suraja Doulah is heartily detested by all classes—it would be well for the English to have secured her favour. But if, on the other hand, Suraja Doulah holds his own—which is more likely, since he has his paw upon the old Nabob's treasury, and sticks at nothing in the way of assassination—we shall mortally offend him by anything like protection of these Gentoos. Would to Heaven we had better defences, Bob, and a more energetic garrison! for it strikes me this settlement is about as safe as a village built under the shadow of Vesuvius, or a château on the slope of Etna."

It was on the day after this arrival that Omichund, the Gentoo merchant, came to wait upon my patron. This man's revenues had been considerably diminished during the last three years by the Company's withdrawal of the privileges he had so long enjoyed; and to a mind so avaricious even the possession of vast wealth would fail to atone for this diminution of income. The old man's influence had also been lessened, and his pride humiliated by the Company's ceasing to employ him as a mediator at the Durbar; and this, I doubt not, he felt no less keenly than his more substantial loss.

His manner was even more servile than usual; but I fancied I detected a sinister light in his eyes as he complimented Mr. Holwell, who gratified him with a piece of betel-nut wrapped in a leaf called pawn, a kind of sweetmeat much affected by the natives, and the interchange of which is a token of friendship.

Omichund had heard of our guests' arrival, and began at once to discuss the subject.

"Company Sahab do well to receive Kissendass," he said. "Raja Bullub, the father of Kissendass, is great friends with Begum Sahab—much very great friends. Wicked people say Begum Sahab is too much friends with Rajah Bullub; but

Omichund is no man to believe lies. If Begum Sahab and the little child get into power, it will be good for the English Company; but if not——”

He stopped, and shook his head ominously, with his shining black eyes fixed on my patron's face.

“If not, what?” asked Mr. Holwell impatiently.

“What should Omichund know, saheb?” replied the old man with a crafty smile; “Omichund is less than no one. Company Sahab has not employed him at the Durbar these many years. His honourable masters have left off to trust to him. But he is an old man, and has much experience, and eyes that see and ears that hear. He has heard something.”

“What, man?” cried Mr. Holwell; “for Heaven's sake don't stand croaking there like a bird of evil omen. Speak, raven!”

“I have heard what the Soubahdar Allaverdy said to his great-nephew, Suraja Doulah, not three days ago,” said Omichund solemnly. “He has been long dying, the old Soubahdar, but the hour is near. Siva, the destroyer, has his hand outstretched to seize the old Mahometan, and he will go to the lower hell of darkness with the spirits that know not Bramah. Not three days ago the old man sent for his adopted son, and it seemed that he had an unnatural strength lent him to enable him to give his last counsels to his heir. ‘Lamp of Riches, light of my soul,’ he said to Suraja, ‘I leave you a mission. It is to sweep the European off the face of Hindostan. They are a dangerous people, my son. They make quarrels between the Hindoo kings, and profit by the strifes they raise. They make pretences, to seize and plunder the goods of the rulers of the south; and think not they will leave you free from their depredations. The most dangerous of all are the English. I myself would have freed you from this danger, had Allah lengthened my days. The work, my son, must now be yours. The power of the English is great; they have lately reduced Angria, and possessed themselves of his country. Suffer them not to have fortifications or soldiers: if you do, the country is not yours.’”

Mr. Holwell affected to receive Omichund's information with entire equanimity; but when the old man had paid his farewell compliments, and departed, I quickly saw that my patron was somewhat alarmed. I asked him whether it was not so; and he answered me, after his wont, with perfect frankness. He had, indeed, by this time, elevated me to a position of confidence and friendship second only to that of a son.

“Yes, Robert,” he said, “I do fear Suraja Doulah. There is no tyrant so cruel, no despot so murderous, as a coward. Allaverdy was capable of hellish treachery, but he was a brave man. When the hour of extreme peril arose, he cared not with what weapon he destroyed his enemy; but he did not war against possible antagonists. To be suspected by Suraja Doulah is to

be doomed. He feared the Deputy-governor of Dacca, and midnight assassins removed the object of his fear. He feared Hassein Coolly Khan, and Hassein Coolly was slaughtered at noontide in the streets of the city. In his two uncles he saw probable opponents; both are dead. If he fears the English, Heaven protect us against a foe so secret and so deadly; for we have not the power to protect ourselves. From the sleep which we have slept for the last ten years, nothing short of a thunder-clap will awaken us. It is quite possible the bolt is about to fall."

In little more than a month after this interview, on the 9th of April, 1756, the Nabob Allaverdy died; and about the same date came a second letter from Mr. Watts of Cassimbazar, recommending that Raja Bullub's family should no longer receive protection in Calcutta, as affairs were now very doubtful.

This prudent recommendation was unattended to, in spite of Mr. Holwell's remonstrances with his seniors in Council. It seemed, indeed, as if these gentlemen were bent upon inviting the ruin which was so soon to overtake them.

A private letter from Mr. Watts arrived about the same time, to warn our president that Suraja Doulah had spies at Calcutta; that the weakness of its fortifications and garrison was the common talk of the Durbar, nay, even of the very streets and market-places of Muxadavad; and that it behoved us to prevent such spies carrying their information daily to the Soubahdar's council-chamber.

This letter was communicated by the president to Mr. Holwell, as Zemindar, who gave immediate orders at all the guarded landing-places that no one should be permitted to land or enter the town without a passport from him. Several suspected persons were arrested, and turned out of the place, and none admitted without a strict examination. My own suspicions pointed to a far more important person than any among those who were thus arrested. The English Company had made a powerful enemy for themselves in Omichund, whose pretended friendship I could not doubt was but a mask to hide his real feelings. A Hindoo, passionately fond of money, crafty, proud, and subtle, was of all created beings the least likely patiently to endure an injury such as the Company had inflicted upon him. We knew him to have ready access to the Durbar. Where else need we look for spies, when this hidden foe had the ear of the tyrant?

I ventured to hint my suspicions to my patron, and found that his ideas on the subject fully coincided with my own.

Within a few days of Suraja Doulah's accession, Omichund came to Mr. Holwell to inform him that Narain Sing, whose brother occupied a post of some importance about the person of the new Nabob, had got into Calcutta in the disguise of a European pedlar, and was at Omichund's house, where he



awaited my patron's permission to visit him. He brought a perwannah, or order, from the Nabob, demanding that Raja Bullub's family should be immediately given up. In the absence of the president and his second in authority, Mr. Holwell felt himself bound to receive this messenger. He came accordingly, and was entertained with all due respect; but when he tendered his official document, Mr. Holwell prudently declined to receive it in the absence of the president, to whom the paper was addressed. By this means time was gained for deliberation; and on the president's return, which occurred the next morning, a council was immediately held to decide this important question. My patron had in the meantime discovered that the Nabob's messenger had been smuggled into the place by the agency of Omichund—another suspicious fact against this venerable Gentoo.

The authorities of Calcutta now found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. The fortune of the hour was yet undecided. Should the Begum's cause prosper, it would be fatal to offend her favourites; should she fail, it would be ruin to have defied Suraja Doulah.

In this difficulty the council decided that as Narain Sing had stolen like a thief into the settlement, his perwannah should not be received, and he was turned out of Calcutta with contumely by unwise and insolent subordinates, who entertained themselves at the spy's expense. A letter from the president to Mr. Watts at Cassimbazar explained, and in a manner apologised for, this treatment.

Not long were we suffered to remain ignorant of the mistake we had made. Allaverdy's widow, desirous of peace, prevailed upon her daughter to acknowledge Suraja Doulah, which concession was no sooner made than Suraja put the Begum under lock and key, and at once possessed himself of her palaces and treasures, together with the person of the baby pretender. Thus in a few hours perished all our hopes of favour from the family of Raja Bullub.

Nor was the new Nabob slow to show us that we had little to expect from his friendship. Tidings from home of a breach between England and France had at last aroused us from our torpor; and workmen were employed in repairing the parapet and embrasures of the fort, together with the gun-carriages—all sorely in need of reparation.

This most necessary work—so imprudently deferred to the hour of imminent danger—was but half done, when the president received a perwannah from the Nabob, to the effect that he had been informed that we were building a wall and digging a large ditch round the town of Calcutta, and commanding us to desist once from such works.

The president immediately replied, that we had dug no ditch

since the invasion of the Morattoes; that in the prospect of a war between France and England, we were anxious to prevent the possibility of such a calamity as that which had some years before overtaken our countrymen at Madras; and for this end we were repairing our line of guns to the water-side.

The result of this hasty answer was fatal. A war between the French and English was the very danger this craven-hearted prince had been taught to dread.

After this the authorities at Calcutta endeavoured to soothe the Nabob's wrath with some slight concessions, and even went so far as to destroy some of our few defences; but without avail. Suraja Doulah still obstinately demanded that we should throw down a wall we had never built, and fill up a ditch that had not been dug.

On the 6th of June came rumours of calamity. The Company's factory and fort at Cassimbazar had been invested by the Nabob, to whom Mr. Watts had surrendered after a brief parley. With a garrison of less than fifty men, a deficiency of ammunition, and but a few small cannon, all more or less out of repair, it would indeed have needed the genius of Clive to encounter so powerful a besieger. Yet had the garrison but held out for ever so short a period, the time gained would have been invaluable to us at Calcutta; since, had the Nabob's march been deferred but a few days, the season of heavy rains would have commenced, and the country have become almost impassable for troops and cannon.

So deeply did Ensign Elliot, the commanding officer at Cassimbazar, feel the humiliation of this tame surrender, that he shot himself through the head, whereby at least he escaped the fate of his men, who were all put in irons and marched off to the common gaol at Muxadavad. So much clemency had we to expect from the new Nabob.

Dark was the gloom which now brooded over Calcutta. In every countenance appeared the common expectation of a swift-approaching peril. With some it took the form of fear, and many a pale face was to be seen in the streets and on the fort, for Suraja Doulah had the reputation of being a man to whom cruelty was a favourite pastime: and who could tell what hellish ingenuity he might exercise to make the cup of death unnaturally bitter?

With some bold spirits, however, this crisis was a period of feverish excitement. Warriors by nature, these poor untutored heroes sniffed the scent of battle from afar, and were glad.

Amongst these was Philip Hay. I talked with him after the evil tidings had come from Cassimbazar, and found him in excellent spirits. However bitterly I had suffered from this man, there were times when I was compelled to admire his marvellous equanimity of temper. He had borne his dreary life during the

last four years with consummate cheerfulness, and had ingratiated himself into the favour of his officers, from whom he had speedily picked up any military knowledge they were willing to impart. His good conduct had advanced him from the rank of a private to that of corporal, in which position he was more than a match for the truculent Irish sergeant, Mr. O'Blagg. Between Hay and myself friendly relations had steadily continued, despite our altered positions. He had seen my good fortune without envy—nay, indeed, I believe with a lazy kind of satisfaction, as releasing his conscience from the burden of my ruin. He could now rub his hands cheerily, and say, "Egad, Bob, 'tis the old Scripture story of Joseph and his brethren over again. My selling you into slavery has made your fortune."

Meanwhile, I on my part had never omitted to do him a service when the opportunity arose; and though my small influence had not gained him much promotion, it had secured him some trifling benefits, for which he was needlessly grateful.

I found him lounging on one of the batteries, and looking up the Hooghly with an eager expression in his eyes.

"Well, Bob," he cried, as I approached, "I think we are near the end of this dead calm. Be sure the taking of Cassimbazar was but the first act in a stirring tragedy, and we shall soon hear the thunder of the Nabob's guns."

"I think the French have taught these Eastern tyrants not to count too much upon their ponderous artillery, which they can but fire once in a quarter of an hour. It was said in the Deccan the other day that Bussy's musketry drew smoke from the Morattoes' breasts, and sacrificed hecatombs upon the fire-altars of the French. Depend upon it, they have begun to awaken to the power of European artillery."

"But not such artillery as ours, Bob. The Nabob knows our strength to a gun, and knows he can crush us; and, what is more, means to do it, Mr. Robert Ainsleigh. So much the better, say I. Welcome the struggle. Let us not walk meekly into this Indian lion's jaws, like those poor cravens of Cassimbazar. Give us a hard fight and a bloody death, if needs be so that history may record how one handful of Englishmen were found to defy the Eastern tiger. Do you know what I would do if I were commandant of the fort?"

"I cannot conceive what original piece of strategy your heroic genius might devise."

"I would collect every ounce of powder we could scrape together—and the Lord knows it would not be much—in the cellars below the fort, and blow fort, factory, and Englishmen to the stars, before the Nabob's black devils should enter our gates."

"It would be a more heroic ending than the capitulation of Madras, and hardly a more costly one, and as a last resource might fairly be tried. But when we have used all our gun-

powder in defending ourselves, we shall not have the means for a public suicide. Alas! Phil, I fear a more ignoble end awaits the English in Bengal!"

Upon this we parted, with a friendly nod of farewell; I being obliged to return to my patron's house, where my services might at any time be wanted to copy or translate a letter, or for some other small business detail. Mr. Holwell was now constantly backwards and forwards between his house and the council-chamber, where all the excitement of expectation and uncertainty prevailed.

Now that danger was at our very doors, there was at least some show of activity. Letters demanding reinforcements were despatched to Madras and Bombay, but with little or no hope that help could reach us at either station in time, since the sea was closed by the south monsoon for the present, and the journey by land was the work of a month. Nor did we shrink from the humiliation of asking nearer aid from the French and Dutch; only to meet with contumely and disappointment from both. We had no resource, therefore, but in our own feeble numbers. These, augmented by militia, amounted to scarce five hundred men, two-thirds of whom were Torpases, Armenians, and Portuguese inhabitants, of whose temper or constancy we knew nothing. Our Indian matchlock-men were increased to fifteen hundred, and we now lost no time in storing provisions and erecting such works of defence as we were capable of constructing at so short a notice.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### TARA.

Now was enacted a tragic drama, in which I was destined to play a strange part. Nearly a week had gone by since the fatal news from Cassimbazar. The Nabob and his army were on the road to Calcutta, advancing with so impatient a haste on the part of their vengeful master that many of the troops fell a sacrifice to the fierceness of an almost tropical sun. During this interval the president and Mr. Holwell had kept a sharp watch upon the movements of Omichund, who was now suspected as the hidden instigator of all this mischief. They did not watch in vain. On the 13th of June a letter was intercepted, addressed to Omichund by the Nabob's chief spy, and advising him at once to place his treasures and effects beyond the reach of danger.

This was considered decisive evidence of the Gentoo merchant's perfidy. As he happened, unluckily for himself, to visit the president shortly after the stoppage of this letter—having probably heard of the circumstance by one of those sidewinds

of treachery which are ever blowing about in the East—he was at once placed under arrest and confined in the fort, while a guard of twenty men were despatched to his house to prevent the removal of his effects.

With this sinister event closed the 14th of June. On the evening of the 15th I left my office, where I had been working busily all day under my employer's direction, sorting and arranging papers in sealed packets in readiness for their sudden removal. I was relieved by the change from the tropical heat of the day, which even our wetted blinds could not exclude, to the comparative coolness of evening, and strolled along the streets of Calcutta in a listless, mechanical way, thinking of our desperate position, and imagining the contrast between the sluggish quiet of the half-built town—where vagabond dogs were squabbling in the gutter, and noisy cranes performing their work of scavengers, and here and there a lazy Gentoo shuffling from his shop to a neighbour's, or a dirty fakir squatting on the muddy path, absorbed in his pretended devotions—with the dread scene of warfare that must ere long be enacted in those very streets.

In such an idle meditative mood I walked a distance of three miles from the fort, and by-and-by found myself near Mr. Omichund's house, that splendid habitation which I had once entered at a time of festival, and the image of which had ever since remained imprinted on my mind as the picture of some fairy palace in the tales of the *Arabian Nights*. Under what an altered aspect was I now to behold it!

A great crowd had gathered round the gilded gates, and a hundred voices rent the air in a confused clamour as I drew near. Nor was the excitement of the crowd without sufficient cause. A volume of flame and smoke had just burst from the open roof of the quadrangle, and loud and shrill from every lip arose the cry of "fire!"

I asked one of the bystanders how the fire had arisen.

"I know not, saheb," the man replied in Bengalee; "there has been a fight between Omichund's servants—Omichund has many servants, three hundred servants—and the Company saheb's guards, and there has been much people killed. Hazarimull, Omichund's brother, and steward of his house, had hidden himself in the women's apartments, and the Company's guards went to seize him."

The flame and smoke mounted higher from the open roof, and above the clamour of the crowd I heard the agonized shrieks of women within the burning house.

"Great God! the women are there," I cried.

"Yes," the Gentoo answered coolly, "much women in the house—Omichund's daughters and grand-daughters. They all live in the house."

I remembered those latticed apartments which Mr. Holwell

had pointed out to me on the night of the natch, and without another thought I broke through the passive crowd, whose shrill exclamations in Bengalee sounded like the chatter of a flock of parrots, and entered the central hall of the house.

Happily the fire had but just broken out, for in Calcutta this element of destruction is doubly fearful, so swift is the progress of the flames where there is so little to check them. But though the fire had yet attacked only one corner of the gallery, a universal scene of ruin met my gaze. The fray had been a severe one, many being wounded on each side; and it is only to be wondered that our own guard were not slaughtered to a man, since the odds were fifteen to one against them.

By the time I made my way into the centre of the court, those piercing shrieks of terror-stricken women which I had heard without the gate had subsided, or were smothered by the groans and execrations of the peons, or native servants, who were crowded on the staircases and in the great open hall.

Pushing my way through a swarm of these wretches, I came upon a sergeant of our own troops, who was leaning wounded against the marble basin of a fountain.

He staggered to his feet and grasped me by the arm.

"Oh, for God's sake, sir, do something to stop those black devils!" he cried; "they are murdering the women up yonder."  
"Murdering the women?"

"Yes; butchering them in cold blood. One of Omichund's head peons, a man of high caste, has set fire to the house, and is slaughtering those helpless creatures to save them from the pollution of an honest Englishman's touch. Half our men are wounded, the rest mad with rage—there is no one can stop the hellish work. Hark!"

He pointed upwards as a long wild cry of despair rang out above our heads. I dashed towards the staircase, mounted with a rush, and broke through the first door I came to. It opened into the women's apartments, which communicated with each other in a long range of gaily-decorated rooms, with gaudy painted ceilings and bright lattices, walls hung with muslin draperies, divans covered with rich embroidered stuffs, and in every corner the clumsy bepainted and begilded image of Door-gah, with her ten arms; or Siva, seated on his white bull, the symbol of purity and dominion; or Sukee, the Hindoo Ceres, crowned with grain; or Ram, the protector of empires, encircled with a snake, and riding on a monkey.

A glance showed me these things in the first two rooms through which I passed. Of human life or death both these were empty; but in the third room I came upon a spectacle the like of which has seldom frozen the heart of an Englishman.

Five women, all in the bloom of youth, lay stretched on the floor and divans, stabbed to death. For a few thrilling mo-

ments I bent over each with the faint hope that among these victims of pagan prejudice some might yet be saved; but, alas! in every breast the vital spark was extinct. For a moment I paused to listen. I heard the hoarse clamour of men's voices in the court below, but upon this upper floor all was silence; the hellish work was done.

I passed on, appalled by this unsurpassable horror. In the two following chambers I found eight more women, thirteen in all, massacred by the fury of the misguided wretch who doubtless thought that by this barbarous act he was securing his master's household from the abomination of the Christian's accursed touch, and further, procuring for his victims a swift transition to the heights of heaven, without the preliminary ordeal of those five worlds of purgation through which the soul despatched under ordinary circumstances must needs travel.

The bigotry which will caste its victims beneath the obscene car of the Hindoo Moloch, or enable them to be swung in mid-air by an iron hook thrust through the muscles of the spine, is an unknown quantity; and I had less reason to be surprised by this dreadful scene than to regret that it should have been caused, however indirectly, by the policy of the English Company.

While I stood, as if transfixed, gazing blankly upon the scene of ruin, a long hollow groan of human agony startled my ear, and looking in the direction whence it came, I perceived by the movement of a curtain that some sufferer yet lingered in the agony of death. I sprang towards the spot, pulled aside the curtain, and discovered a Hindoo servant lying close to the wall, desperately wounded, and with a bloody dagger grasped in his hand.

He rolled his black eyes towards me with a hideous expression of hate.

"Away!" he cried; "avaunt, accursed Englishman! Leave me to die by the wounds this hand has inflicted; or, if I am destined to live, be sure I shall be an instrument to execute vengeance on your hated race. Was it not enough that the glory of Hindostan should be trampled beneath the foot of the Mahometan invader? Was it not enough that the rugged hordes of Tamerlane should sweep over the mountains that defended the sons and successors of Bramah? Was it not enough that the universal monarchy of India should be broken and spoiled by the lying followers of a false prophet, and the glorious reign of Vicram blotted out like a forgotten dream by these Tartar destroyers of our gods; nay, the holy temple of Benares buried beneath the impious shrine of our usurpers? Is this last degradation to be worse than the first, and our masters' daughters defiled by the eaters of sheep and oxen? Sooner may Siva, the destroyer, blast us with the murderous breath of his giant nostrils!"

"What!" I cried, "are you the barbarous slaughterer of yonder helpless women?"

"Yes," answered this madman; "and were there fifty more, my hand should slay them, rather than they should fall into the power of your unholy race."

"Mistaken wretch, they would have suffered no harm from us," I answered.

"What!" he cried, "are your soldiery so pure that you can answer for their treatment of my master's household? or has my master received such kindness from the English traders he has served as shall warrant his women in trusting themselves to their mercy? You lock him in your prison without allowing him an hour to bid his children good-bye or give orders to his household, and then you send your soldiers hither to ravage the house of the man who has served you faithfully for thirty years, and whose service you reject with scorn at the first whisper of a slanderer."

To this effect did the wounded wretch address me, in very pure Hindostanee. He was a young man, with a powerful frame, and features which, when undistorted by pain, must have been singularly handsome.

I left him in utter disgust, yet not without some sense of shame for the proceedings of my masters. That Omichund was a traitor, I had little doubt, and his imprisonment in the fort an act of common prudence justified by the occasion; but I considered the attack upon his house an act of violence at once unwarrantable and unwise.

The fire had been by this time extinguished, but the apartments I next entered were filled with smoke, through which the lamps glimmered faintly. In the first of these I groped for some time, half suffocated by the foul atmosphere, and found nothing; but immediately on entering the second, I stumbled against a prostrate form, and for the moment supposed I had fallen upon another victim to the peon's fury.

I knelt down and raised the inanimate figure in my arms. The form was slender as that of a child, and lay quite lifeless across my shoulder, as I bore my light burden from that suffocating atmosphere, overjoyed to feel the faint flutter of a heart which I had supposed to be stilled for ever.

As I returned towards the room where I had left the wounded peon, it flashed upon me that to carry my burden thither was but to convey a new victim to that murderous fanatic. For a few moments I paused, at a loss what to do. I knew not yet whether the helpless creature in my arms was wounded to death, and this faint throb I felt only the last expiring struggle, or whether animation was but suspended by the suffocating smoke. To be seen attempting to carry her from that house would be to doom her to instant death, and in all likelihood to perish with her



Casting a rapid glance around the chamber in which I stood, I perceived that besides the lattices opening upon the court, there were windows on the opposite side, curtained with embroidered muslin. To tear aside the draperies, and survey the prospect from one of these windows was the work of an instant. Thank God! here there seemed a chance of escape. The window opened on a balcony and veranda, whence a flight of steps led down to the garden, an extensive area of highly-cultivated ground, on which Omichund had spent much care and money.

I was sufficiently familiar with the geography of Calcutta to know that this garden was bounded on one side by the Morattoe ditch, on the other by the garden belonging to that harpy, Govindram Metre, who possessed a handsome house next to that of Omichund. Could I but cross the garden unperceived, I might return to Fort William by the unfrequented road which followed the line of the Morattoe boundary, a road which was guarded by our own men, by whose aid I might perchance obtain a hackerry, in which to convey my helpless burden to the fort.

I opened the window, ran down the steps and into the garden, where the stars were shining upon the rich Oriental foliage, and where I heard the shrill cries of the jackals in the country beyond, like the voices of children at play. A huge vampire bat brushed across my face as I turned into one of the dark walks, and for the moment blinded me.

A kind of instinct guided me to the part of the garden which I wanted to reach; and here I found a gate, guarded by a topaz in our service, who was lounging at his post, ignorant of, or indifferent to, the work of ruin going on so near him.

Now, for the first time, I paused to look upon the creature I had perchance snatched from the jaws of death. The night air had revived her senses. The heavy lids were slowly lifted from large dark eyes, which gazed upon me with a look of mingled fear and wonder.

"Save them!" she cried with a shudder, in that Indian language which was now familiar to me as my own,—“save them, or he will slaughter them all—mother, sisters, all dead! Ah, why not Tara also? Shall Tara live when all she loves are slain?”

I saw the poor creature's senses were yet wandering, and tried to soothe her with broken words of comfort, such as one speaks to a child, but made no attempt to enlighten her as to her real position. She seemed to me, indeed, scarce more than a child, and I had seen too little of Hindoo women of high caste not to be surprised by her beauty, which was perfect of its type, combining as it did the pure lines of the Greek with the rich colouring of the Asiatic.

It was not in this moment, however, that I awoke to a full sense of her loveliness. I thought now only of saving her, and hastened onward to a point where the topaz had told me I

might possibly find that species of coach drawn by oxen which the natives call a hackerry. I was fortunate enough to find such a vehicle, in which I placed my hapless companion, who had by this time fully recovered consciousness, and besought me most piteously to take her back to the house where her mother and sisters were lying.

I explained that to do this would be to carry her straight to death, and told her that I would convey her to some English ladies, who would succour and protect her,

She thanked me, but I could perceive she felt a sense of shame in my companionship, to which her despair alone rendered her comparatively indifferent. I took my beauteous charge straight to Mr. Holwell, assured that from him I should receive the wisest counsel and the most generous help. He was inexpressibly shocked by the catastrophe which I described to him; but after having assured the weeping damsel of his protection, he drew me aside, and I could see that my adventure was somewhat distasteful to him.

"Upon my word, Bob, thou art an unlucky fellow!" he exclaimed; "for thy most generous instincts only lead thee into mischief. If anything could complicate our relations with that crafty knave Omichund, it is this chivalrous rescue of his granddaughter. Be sure he will swear that the whole affair yonder was a planned thing to enable you English Paris to ravish this Asiatic Helen. Were it not inhuman to harbour such a thought, I should be inclined to wish the poor child had perished with the rest of her family. But I will take her at once to Mrs. Witherington—a kind soul, as you know—who will keep your fair Hindoo in hiding till we can decide what is best to be done with her."

Mrs. Witherington was the wife of one of the civil servants of the factory, a good, matronly creature, whom I knew and respected. To her house Mr. Holwell conducted the weeping Indian girl; but before the dear child was removed by him, she approached me suddenly, and falling on her knees at my feet, lifted her clasped hands towards me with a pathetic grace that touched me to the heart.

"Think not Tara is ungrateful," she said, in that native language which sounded peculiarly melodious from her lips, "or that she will ever forget the brave Englishman who has saved her. Ah, no, Saheb, she is not ungrateful—she is only despairing. She has lost all—all!"

Her voice was here made inarticulate by the sobs that well-nigh choked her. I raised her from the ground, and Mr. Holwell, with a gentle force, removed her. He brought a dark cloak of his own, in which he wrapped this white-robed maiden, and, thus enveloped, was able to conduct her unobserved to Mr. Witherington's house which was fortunately near at hand.

The next day, the 15th of June, was spent in frantic efforts to erect works of defence, which might wisely have been prepared in the long leisure of the last eight years, but which it was alike hopeless and useless now to attempt. Such an endeavour was, however, made; and now that the enemy was at the door, the civil and military commanders of the settlement showed themselves mightily energetic.

I had at the beginning of our troubles enlisted myself among the militia, and am proud to declare my association with a body of men who proved themselves more than equal to the better-trained military in courage, skill, and patience. With these gentlemen I spent the best part of the day at drill, and was amused by the eagerness of many a young Alexander who scarce knew one end of his gun from the other.

Even while thus employed I could not keep my thoughts from Omichund and his lovely granddaughter. The images of the Indian girl, so helpless and desolate in her strange home, and of the old man in his prison, haunted me with a painful persistency.

When I met my patron in the evening at our melancholy dinner, he gave me a sad account of Omichund's condition.

"I knew that the tidings of his calamity must soon reach him," said Mr. Holwell, "and thought it best he should receive the news from my lips, with such extenuation as I could urge of our own share in the event. I found the old man pacing his prison-chamber—which is one of the best rooms in the fort—like some caged tiger, and it was some minutes before he would listen to me with any show of reason. He was most bitter in his denunciations of what he called our English perfidy, violently asseverated his innocence of any underhand dealings with the Nabob or the Nabob's people, and declared that—after profiting largely by his devotion and services—we had used him with unexampled cruelty and were bent on reducing him to beggary. 'You envy me my hard-won wealth,' he cried, with a piteous whine, 'and would see me end my days as a mendicant in the streets of Calcutta.'

"This was before he knew the fate of his household?" I asked.

"It was. Not once did he question me about his family. His every thought was of his treasures, and of these he raved like the veriest madman. Our detention of him at the fort was a trick to enable us to plunder his house. We were robbers, nothing but robbers. I bade him be calm, and summon all his fortitude to enable him to bear what I had to tell, since a worse calamity than the plunder of his treasures had fallen upon his house; and then I told him what had happened, defending the policy of the president, who had but sought to guard against the secret removal of his possessions. My tidings produced a more awful effect than I had anticipated. He fell on a sudden from loud raving to a kind of stupor, and glared at me with glassy eyes in utter silence. I stopped with him for a long time,

endeavouring by every means I knew to comfort, or, at least, to win him to speak freely of his affliction; but in vain. For the space of an hour, as I believe, he sat silent, statue-like, gazing now at me, now into space, with the most awful look I ever beheld in mortal eyes. At last his limbs stirred faintly, with a shivering motion, and he whispered between his clenched teeth, 'And this too I owe the English.'

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed indignantly; "it is no fault of ours that the chief of his servants is a bigot and a madman."

"True, Bob; and this I tried to explain to him, but might as usefully have argued with the monsoon. He waved me from him, and with his stony gaze fixed upon blank space, cried aloud, like some prophet of old, 'The day shall come when English maidens shall fear the power of the Hindoo despoiler, and when the blood of your children and your children's children shall be shed in payment of that which was spilt last night!' In this mood I left him, after entreating that all kindness and attention should be shown to him by those who have the care of the prison."

"And you did not tell him of his granddaughter's escape?"

"No, Robert; for I saw he was in no mood to be consoled by that single rescue, and I feared that, to his suspicious mind, the circumstance would tell against us. It will be safer to let him know the truth by-and-by."

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE BOLT FALLS.

NEXT morning, the 16th of June, brought us tidings of the Nabob's approach. His army had crossed the river from Hooghly on the previous day, in a vast fleet of boats, and were fast bearing down on us—an armament as mighty in proportion to our numbers as that barbaric host which descended on the sea-sands of Marathon two thousand years before; and we, alas! had no Aristides. Now, for the first time in my life, I beheld the horror and confusion of war; and piteous was the scene which Calcutta presented to my unaccustomed eyes. Fear took possession of every breast. The Gentoo inhabitants who had not already fled abandoned their houses, carrying such possessions as they could, and flying they knew not whither, to escape the wrath of the tyrant; though what offence these, or we ourselves, had committed against Suraja Doulah I cannot conceive. While the Gentooes thus scattered themselves, the Portuguese, to the number of two thousand, flocked to the fort, where men, women, and children were indiscriminately admitted, together with the Englishwomen, who all exchanged the doubtful shelter of their houses for the comparative security of

Fort William. And now military and militia were ordered to their posts, from the northernmost of which the van of the Nabob's army was descried at mid-day.

I will not enter into the details of the siege that gave Calcutta into the hands of our bloodthirsty foe. A full account of the many errors and blunders which assisted our defeat has been published by my friend Mr. Holwell, who, as second in command, held one of the most dangerous outposts on the second and busiest day of our defence. That we had among us many brave men, there can be no doubt—from the gallant captain who perished in our subsequent most cruel agony of the Black Hole, to the fiery young civilian, who, on finding himself cut off from his party, refused quarter, and contrived to demolish five of the enemy in a hand-to-hand fight before he fell. But that we had amongst us not one great soldier is, alas! equally true. What might not have been achieved for us, had there been time to call Clive to our aid! One hour of his presence might have saved us a hundred errors and a shameful fate; but Providence had willed it otherwise, and Clive only landed at Fort St. David on the day that witnessed the fall of Fort William.

Our errors were too numerous for detail, as the weakness of our defences is almost beyond description. A body of men who might have done wonders in the close quarters of Thermopylæ were scattered wide, as on the plains of Babylon; or, in plain words, instead of concentrating our forces at the fort, we attempted to hold three paltry batteries, which had been hastily erected on the land-sides of the city, each at some three hundred yards from the fort. Mr. Holwell was second in command at one of these posts; I had a subordinate rank at another; and from this moment both of us were as actively engaged in the defence as if we had held His Majesty's commission.

The first day closed with something like a triumph on the English side, owing to the valiant conduct of Ensign Pischard, who at midnight took his party across a rivulet, surprised four thousand of the enemy wrapt in slumber, spiked their guns, drove them from their quarters, and returned to his station without the loss of a man.

The second day witnessed a defence as desperate as it was unavailing. The murderous wretch whose work I had beheld, Juggernaut Sing, Omichund's chief servant, had caused himself, wounded as he was, to be set on a horse, and he now appeared leading on the enemy to the weakest points of our defences, displaying superhuman ferocity, and a fiendish ingenuity in his endeavours to secure our ruin.

The struggle began with the break of day, and raged long and furiously at the batteries and in the streets, where the enemy got possession of several houses, from the windows of which they harassed us with a perpetual fire of small-arms.

Towards evening the batteries were abandoned, after much loss on our part, and a far greater waste of human life on the side of the enemy, whose inexhaustible numbers were scarcely to be weakened by slaughter. At dusk the English had retreated to the fort, the retirement to which point was not effected without difficulty. The abandonment of the batteries, upon which much reliance had been placed, was the signal for a kind of panic. The fort was noisy with the clamours and groans of the Portuguese, who revealed their craven natures without compunction; while the Armenian militia were worse than useless in this hour of peril. The English were still undaunted; and little did I expect to see their spirits fail, let the issue of affairs be what it might.

At two o'clock in the morning a solemn council of war was held, to which civilians as well as military were admitted; but, with a lamentable weakness on the part of our chiefs, we were allowed to disperse, after a debate of two hours, in a state of indecision as to whether we should immediately escape to the ships, or hold out for another day. With the first glimmer of morning the enemy's cannonade began, while their matchlockmen fired incessantly upon our yet inhabited houses, as well as on the bastions and ramparts. Ensign Pischard and his gallant party took possession of the Governor's house, but in a few hours returned to the fort wounded; on which our men were recalled from our few remaining outposts. These were immediately seized by the enemy; and the panic within the garrison increased with every moment.

Now arose a scene of dire confusion in the endeavour to disperse safely of the wretched Portuguese women and children, whose presence had so intensified the horror of our situation. We had but small means of shipping-off these poor creatures, many boats having deserted under cover of night. To the few that remained the helpless wretches rushed helter-skelter, heedless of all attempts to preserve discipline. The result was fatal: several boats were swamped by the weight of their crew, and the poor creatures drowned or immediately sacrificed to the enemy, who remorselessly slaughtered such as floated to shore alive. These black demons had taken possession of the houses and enclosures along the bank of the river, whence they discharged fire-arrows into the *Dudaly* and other vessels.

The Englishwomen had by this time embarked on board the *Judaly*, with several of the garrison. These, alarmed by the fire-arrows, instead of returning to the fort, removed the ship three miles down the river to Govindpore, on their own responsibility. The contagion of this example spread but too fast. All the other vessels weighed anchor and sailed after the ship; while many of the militia, appalled by this sudden desertion, made haste to abandon the shore. Among the military who

had left us in charge of the women, and were too prudent to return, was my old enemy, Sergeant O'Blagg. The experience of the siege had convinced me that this gentleman's heroism went no farther than the employment of big words, and a bellowing, bullying manner to his inferiors. In active service he preferred the better part of valour.

Mr. Holwell's plate, jewels, and papers had been embarked in the *Diligence* Snow during the previous evening. He and I were now together on the ramparts—a post of no small danger—and I could see by his manner that he was prepared for the worst. The Governor had until this moment been firm, and, although no soldier, had exposed himself to danger with considerable spirit; but at this crisis he seems to have lost all fortitude, and seeing his friends embarking in the two solitary boats that remained, and being further disheartened by the insubordination of his men, and the tidings that our little remaining gunpowder was unfit for use, he forgot at once the grave responsibilities of his position and the dictates of honour, and joined in the ignoble flight. The news of this last disgrace was brought to us by Philip Hay, who had fought like a devil throughout the siege, and whose powder-blackened face was scarcely recognizable this morning.

“Did you ever see such a set of curs, Bob?” exclaimed Mr. Holwell, as the *Dudaly* and the smaller vessels disappeared from our gaze.

“But it is surely only a feint, sir,” I answered; “they are coming back?”

“Yes, Bob, when Calcutta is a heap of ashes, and they are brought back as captives of the Soubahdar. Be sure they will never return of their own accord. They have left us to perish, lad; that is what it means.”

We went into the fort, where the remaining inhabitants flocked around my patron, loud in the expression of their indignation against the deserters.

“You have always been true to our interests, Holwell,” cried the eldest member of Council remaining among us; “I resign my right of command in your favour.”

A loud cheer signified the general approval of this decision.

Mr. Holwell quietly accepted the onerous duty thus assigned him, thanked his superior and the rest for their confidence, and marched straight to the western gate leading to the river, whither I followed, with Philip Hay and some others.

“We will have no more deserters, Bob,” said our new Governor; “and when we leave Fort William, it shall be together, and in a decent soldierly manner.”

A ship which had been stationed at the northern redoubt still remained, and to this vessel Mr. Holwell despatched an officer in a boat, with orders to the captain to bring her down to the

fort. But this last hope was destined to fail us,—the ship struck upon a sandbank, and was at once abandoned by her crew.

We watched this catastrophe with a groan of despair, but did not the less vigorously defend our feeble post. Towards afternoon the enemy's fire abated, and they amused themselves by burning such of the adjacent houses as did not command our ramparts. No longer harassed by their incessant fire, we spent the greater part of the afternoon and ensuing night in throwing out signals for the return of the ships; but neither flags by day nor signal-fires by night would tempt these cravens back to us; yet a single sloop with fifteen men on board might have dropped under our walls during the night and saved every one of us.

In that long day and night of suspense I had but one source of consolation; and that was in the knowledge that the poor little Gentoo maiden I had rescued was safe on board the *Dudley*, where Mrs. Witherington had taken her among her children and native nurses, for one of whom she had easily passed in the confusion of the embarkment.

While the signal-lights were vainly burning, Philip Hay and I paced one of the terraces, and talked over our situation. In the failure of our rescue by the vessels now lying at Govindpore, death seemed inevitable; and we could not refrain from a shudder as we wondered what agonizing form of death the Soubahdar's ingenuity might devise for us.

"I have always thought there was something heroic in being blown from the mouth of a cannon," said the imperturbable Philip; "and the sensation, if unpleasant, must be brief. But I doubt if Suraja Doulah will not reserve so dignified a mode for Holwell and our superiors. These Mahometans have a knack of putting out an enemy's eyes; but I fancy that is an honourable torture they only confer upon near relations. And then there is the slow poison of the *poust*—that too is a privilege allowed only to kindred. But no doubt this Oriental Caligula has numerous modes of executing such small fry as our humble selves, for the titillation of that fine artistic sense of cruelty with which he is said to be gifted. I have somewhere heard that in the old Hindoo law a man who assaults a magistrate shall be punished as if he had murdered a hundred Brahmins, and, a spike being thrust through him, shall be roasted alive. Perhaps the Nabob may choose to dress us in Hindoo fashion."

Before daybreak, the enemy swarmed to the attack in greater numbers than ever; and Mr. Holwell, moved by the entreaties of the weaker spirits among us, consented to treat with our adversary. I went with him to Omichund, whom he had not seen since the day on which he had been the bearer of such fatal news.

We found the old man singularly calm and reasonable.

"I have come to ask your aid, Omichund," Mr. Holwell began



at once. "We have been abandoned by the greater number of our people, though we might have left Fort William with dignity, and secured all the books and papers of the Company, had the Governor and the rest but stood by us. Our position is now desperate, and as your fortunes are linked with ours, I look to you for any help you can afford us."

The old Gentoo bent his head in silence.

"You have been a fast friend of Manickchund, the Governor of Hooghly, who is now before the fort in command of a body of troops," continued Mr. Holwell. "A letter from you to him may secure us more favourable terms than we could make for ourselves. Will you write such a letter?"

"Yes, Saheb, I will write."

"You will bid Manickchund inform the Soubahdar that if he will cease hostilities, the English will obey his commands. We are only fighting in defence of our lives and honour."

"Yes, Saheb, I will write. If the English Company had trusted Omichund, he might have served them at the Durbar, and hindered the coming of this day."

"Ay, friend, we have made many mistakes," Mr. Holwell answered sadly.

The letter was written and thrown over the ramparts at sunrise; but hostilities continued until noon. Of the hundred and ninety men left after the desertion of the ships, twenty-five had been killed or had received their death-wounds, seventy were disabled, while the common soldiers had broken open the store-house of arrack, and were stupidly intoxicated.

At four in the afternoon a man was seen advancing with a flag of truce in his hand. This was at once answered by another on the south-east bastion; for by this time every voice was calling on Mr. Holwell to surrender. A parley ensued, during which the enemy were doing us all the harm they could, while one wretch fired at one of our gentlemen as he stood on the bastion by Mr. Holwell's side. Infuriated by this treachery, my patron ran down to summon the men to the ramparts; but he called in vain. The poor creatures who would have obeyed him had crawled, wounded and helpless, into the fort; and whilst he was seeking these, amongst whom was Philip Hay, the drunken soldiers, bent on escaping by the river, burst open the western gate just as a body of the enemy had forced a gate beyond it, and were rushing to the attack of this. By this act of supreme cowardice and folly the foe were admitted, and swarmed into the fort, a torrent of exulting savages, shouting their Moorish cries of victory. The warehouses were escaladed at the same moment; a general surrender followed, and we all were prisoners of Suraja Doulah, except a few desperate wretches who dropped from the embrasures, and escaped along the slime of the river.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## IN THE BLACK HOLE.

At five o'clock the Nabob entered the fort, sent his officers at once to seize upon the Company's treasury, and installed himself with all pomp in the chief apartment of the factory, where he received the servile compliments of his flatterers, who extolled the conquest of a handful of worn-out civilians with such florid eloquence as may have been lavished on Alexander after the battle of Gaugamela. Omichund and Raja Bullub's son were both summoned before this eastern tyrant, who received them with promising civility; after which he sent for Mr. Holwell, whom he favoured with no less than three interviews, the last in Durbar, or solemn council, at a little before seven o'clock.

At this last interview I had the honour to be present, in attendance on my master, and for the first time beheld the tyrant whose sanguinary reign was happily to be of the briefest. I saw a handsome young man of the higher eastern type, superbly attired, and glittering with jewels, who surveyed my patron and myself with suspicious, if not malevolent, looks.

He had been much disappointed by the contents of the treasury—some fifty thousand rupees—and accused us of having hidden or buried the Company's wealth.

"But you will show me where it is hidden, or it will be the worse for you," he said in a threatening tone.

Mr. Holwell assured him in the most emphatic manner that the money in the treasury constituted the sole funds of the Company at this settlement.

"Would you make me eat dirt?" he cried contemptuously; "would you fool me with your English lies? You are all thieves, and have robbed my honoured grand-uncle, the late Nabob, for the last fifteen years. You sell your passports to Gentoo merchants, who thus cheat us of our revenues. You took payment for your protection of that Gentoo traitor, Kissendass, and the wealth which he has stolen from my uncle's treasury. You have fattened too long upon the land, and it is time there should be an end of you. Inshallah, did I not swear to my dying grand-uncle that I would blot you from the face of the country, and shall I not keep my oath?"

This was by no means promising; but Mr. Holwell contrived so far to mitigate the Soubahdar's displeasure that he presently dismissed us for the night, with a languid yawn, after pledging his word as a soldier that no harm should happen to us.

Cheered by this hopeful prospect, we left the royal presence, and were at once conducted to the Arched Veranda, west of the Black-Hole Prison, where we found the rest of our wretched company, many among them severely wounded, and all

exhausted by days of struggle and nights of watching. Here they were all gathered—some leaning against the wall, others seated hopelessly on the ground—helpless and meek as sheep in an overcrowded market awaiting the butcher, and closely guarded.

For some time we remained in patient silence, broken only by the feeble groans of the wounded, until flames breaking out right and left of us caused a sudden panic. We thought our enemies were going to suffocate us between two fires, and were confirmed in this fear by seeing officers and people with lighted torches going into all the apartments under the easterly curtain to the right of us, bent, as we supposed, on setting fire to them.

A few minutes' hurried consultation succeeded, and rather than wait to be roasted alive, we determined upon falling on the guard, seizing their cimeters, and trying to cut our way through the troops on the parade. Before thus desperately rushing on almost certain death, Mr. Holwell advanced to watch the proceedings of the men with torches, and returned to tell us they were no incendiaries, but were only seeking a place in which to confine us for the night.

At this moment Leech, the Company's smith, who had made his escape when the Nabob entered the fort, approached Mr. Holwell, and told him in a whisper that he had a boat ready, and knew of a secret passage through which he would conduct him to the river. My patron nobly refused to leave the companions who had so affectionately confided in him, and Leech as nobly volunteered to remain and share his fate, which generous resolution, I regret to say, cost the poor fellow his life.

All this was decided in a few hurried whispers, and was scarce settled when a body of the guard advanced to us, with the officers whose blazing torches had so alarmed us. They ordered us into the barracks, a great open place, with arches facing westward, and furnished with a spacious wooden platform, on which we might have passed the night in tolerable comfort.

We entered willingly, eager to repose even on this Spartan couch; but were no sooner within the barracks than the guards advanced to the inner arches and parapet wall, and, with presented muskets, ordered us to go into that small square room in which I had already spent a night, commonly called the Black-Hole Prison; whilst others from the court, off guard, pressed upon us with clubs and drawn cimeters. So sudden and unexpected was the stroke, and so great the throng and pressure upon us, that we rolled like a torrent into the prison; though, I think, had many of us known the narrow limits of the dungeon, we should, even in this last extremity, have rushed upon the guard and suffered them to hew us piecemeal rather than force us living into that torture-chamber.

Now followed a scene of horror I think unparalleled in the story of past ages. One hundred and forty-six wretches,

many among them wounded past hope, all exhausted by continual fatigue and action, jammed together in a space of eighteen feet square, open only by two small close-barred windows looking to the westward, a quarter whence at this season no air could come.

The first impulse was one wild burst of rage. A block of living creatures rolled desperately against the door, in the hope to force it open. But, alas! the door opened inwards, and this dead weight could do nothing against it. Some of these unarmed wretches next tried to drag it open with their hands and nails, and fell back presently with bleeding, lacerated fingers, howling with pain. I, who was at this period crushed into a corner, with Philip Hay's weight leaning full upon me, and the blood from a sabre-wound on his forehead trickling slowly on my face, could but indistinctly perceive what was passing. After some minutes of riot and confusion, I heard my patron's voice, sounding singularly calm and clear above the clamour of the rest. He had fortunately been among the first to enter our dungeon, and had thus been carried close to one of the windows.

He exhorted us in the most pathetic terms to a patient endurance of our sufferings, as the only means whereby we might any of us hope to survive the night. On this followed a brief interval of comparative tranquillity, during which, by the surging movement of the restless crowd, I was borne without effort of my own close to the window at which Mr. Holwell was posted, Philip Hay's weight still bearing down upon me, and was by this accident of position among the few who outlived the night. Near me, clinging to the bars of the window I perceived a sergeant's wife, one Mrs. Carey, the only woman among us, whose husband was also in the prison.

Nothing could be more admirable than my patron's calmness throughout this night of horror. He watched the faces of the guard who were posted outside the bars of our window, and whose countenances were now made visible by the fitful glare of their torches, now hidden in darkness. Among these was an old Indian sergeant, in whose looks Mr. Holwell read something like pity. He implored this man to get us relieved by being divided into separate cells, since there were chambers enough in which we could be placed. He further pressed his entreaty by the promise of a thousand rupees, to be paid the sergeant next morning.

The man disappeared, and for a few delicious moments we, who had heard the brief dialogue enjoyed the rapture of hope. He returned but too soon, to tell us the thing was impossible. Mr. Holwell was not to be satisfied so easily. He reiterated his entreaties, and this time doubled his promised reward. Again the sergeant withdrew, and again returned with the same answer. The thing was impossible without the *Soubahdar's*

order. The Soubahdar was sleeping, and no one dared waken him. One hundred and forty-six wretches languishing in the awful tortures of suffocation, and for them there is no hope because the Soubahdar is sleeping! I think there is one last long slumber from which Suraja Doulah, Soubahdar of Bengal, Behar, and Orixá, will be awakened without ceremony, and that the waking will hardly be a pleasant one.

We had not been shut into this hole of horrors ten minutes when every one among us fell into a perspiration so profuse as to drain every drop of moisture from our bodies. This brought on a raging thirst, which increased every instant. Some now proposed that we should strip ourselves of our clothes, and thus gain at once space and coolness. Many did so, though I can but wonder how they contrived to tear off their garments, so closely were we wedged together. It was then recommended that we should all sit down; and this advice we several times obeyed for a few minutes at a time; but every time the word was given to "rise," some of the weaker among us were trampled or crushed in the struggle, never to rise again.

Before we had been more than an hour immured, our thirst became painful to an almost maddening degree, and a cry for "water" was repeated without cessation. It was a hoarse, perpetual clamour, which resembled the insensate lowing of thirsty cattle rather than the reasonable demand of humanity.

And at this juncture the very compassion which sought to aid us was made an instrument of our destruction; for the old Indian sergeant, taking pity on our agonies, ordered some skins of water to be brought to the window. The water appeared, but the openings between the bars were too narrow to enable the skins to be passed in to us. A clamour and raving as of a thousand devils arose; and many bewildered wretches fought furiously with one another without knowing what they did. Mr. Holwell and two others near the window contrived to pass a little water in among us in hats; but in the fury and contention of this mad crowd these precious draughts were wasted, and but a few drops reached the lips of the stronger struggler who last seized the fragile vessel. The very sight of this water seemed to increase our thirst twenty-fold, though it had been unbearable before; for to this agony there appears to be no limit.

The cries and ravings of those beyond the reach of this tantalizing relief were awful beyond description. I heard old and valued friends calling on my patron by every adjuration of affection for but a few drops to relieve their tortures. Some desperate creatures made a frantic effort to reach the windows, and many were trampled to death beneath their reckless feet. Over these corpses the crowd clambered and struggled, unawed the horrors of death, each sufferer bent only on obtaining it for his own pangs.

Can humanity in the West conceive so horrid a picture of Eastern cruelty? These hellish agonies proved vastly entertaining to the guard without, who held their torches close to the bars, and peered in upon us with hideous grins upon their black faces, jeering and hooting at us for very joy.

I cannot imagine a more vivid vision of hell. A herd of suffering wretches, with parched tongues lolling from their fevered lips, wrestling insensately with each other in the thick smoke and stench of Tophet, while black-faced demons glared upon and gloat over their anguish!

I think I must have been delirious at this time; for I heard a voice, which was my own, and yet seemed not my own, repeating the words of Dives; "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."

O God, what a Pandemonium! On one side rose the blasphemies and imprecations of unbelieving despair; on another, fainter prayers for release or death; the choking sobs and hollow groans of the dying; the Babel-clamour of several languages; while near the windows the crowd were assailing the guard with every imaginable insult, in the hope that they would fire in upon us, and put an end to our misery.

What! cut short so amusing a comedy? To such spectators the best drolling in Bartlemy Fair would have been a poorer show. Was it to be supposed these merry souls would sacrifice such pleasant entertainment as this exhibition afforded them?

I know not at what hour it was, or how long I had suffered. I know it seemed as if I had been in that foul pit a lifetime, when I felt Philip Hay's arm round my neck, and heard him whispering in my ear.

"Bob," he said, "have you ever forgiven me for selling you into bondage?"

"You know I was so foolish as to forgive you long ago."

"You are the best of creatures. Oh, Bob, what a scoundrel I have been! My life has been one long villany. I think I was only born into this world to speak lies and plot treachery. But I was born so poor. Poverty is the father of scoundrels. But I am dying; and I want you to bless me before I die. Let me suck the sweat from your shirt-sleeve; 'tis my sole chance of moistening this red-hot furnace in my throat. Would you bless me, if I gave you your freedom? Supposing you ever escape from this hell, and get back to England, which is doubtful, would you bless me, if I told you that the marriage in Fleet Lane was no marriage—that Margery Hawker is no wife of yours?"

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"I mean that her name is Margery Hay. She is my wife. I was in Paris with those two before I hunted you out in the Temple. I had helped in the elopement, you know, and was

his gentleman body-servant, henchman, bully, and hanger-on in general. The poor child fretted over her dishonour, and he proposed to make an honest woman of her by marrying her—to me. I know not by what process of reasoning he won her consent, but he did win it. She was to go back to her father and mother as the wife of a decent gentleman, one Mr. Philip Hay, and not as the poor waif and stray she was. We were married by the chaplain of the British Legation—I in the character of Mr. Lestrangle's secretary; but beyond that marriage ceremony we are no more man and wife than I and the Empress Catherine. Mr. Lestrangle contrived to prevent the poor soul's return to the home from which he stole her, for, you see, at this time he had not quite made up his mind that he was tired of her; and he despatched me to London in search of you, with ample instructions for my part of spy. Then arose the notable scheme of marrying Margery to you, to prevent your marriage with Miss Dorothea, and thus make assurance doubly sure in the event of our kidnapping plan proving a failure. A tangled web of intrigue, is it not? I left the certificate of my marriage in the safe keeping of a friend in London, in case it should ever be wanted."

"What friend?" I asked eagerly; for I felt him growing heavier as he hung upon me, while his whispers sounded fainter in my ear. "Your friend's name, Phil!" I cried; "for God's sake tell me that!"

"A lawyer, and a fellow I can trust. A scoundrel, Bob; but your thorough-paced scoundrels can trust each other. It's only your half-and-half rogue who turns traitor."

"His name?"

Too late. His arm loosened upon my neck, and he slipped down in a sitting position, not to rise again within my knowledge.

I tried to bend over him, in the hope of picking him up, but found myself powerless to move a limb, so close was I packed. A faint glimmer of dawn now lighted the chamber, and I looked right and left at my neighbours. One was a topaz, the other an English sergeant, both dead. They stood on each side of me, statue-like and hideous figures—dead, but unable to fall, from the equal pressure round us.

On the opposite side of the dungeon was the long wooden platform on which I had once slept. 'This was heaped with the dead and dying—a very mountain of corpses.

Of the revolting stench that now prevailed, and of other physical horrors, I dare not speak. As the day dawned, there arose a kind of calm; the clamour had altogether abated, so much were our numbers reduced by death.

As the light increased, my breathing became every moment more oppressive. I had lived through the night with intervals of delirium. In one of these I had fancied myself in a wooded

valley at Hauteville, while before me, cool and pellucid, stretched a great pool of water, the banks of which had been a favourite resort of mine and Margery's in our brief happy childhood. This vision now returned, and no words can paint the agony with which I gazed on that delusive picture, longing to plunge into those cool depths, and yet bound hand and foot by the pressure of our charnel-house. When this mirage faded, consciousness vanished with it.

I was awakened by a rush of air and a sensation of acute agony, caused by the oppression of my head and chest. Lifting my eyelids with a painful effort, I perceived that the door of our dungeon stood a little way open. I heard afterwards that this had only been effected after full twenty minutes' labour, so difficult was it for the worn-out survivors to remove the dead piled up against this door.

Of the one hundred and forty-six who entered that dungeon some twelve hours before, twenty-three now crawled slowly out, one by one, between a lane of corpses; nor do I think that in the seven circles of his purgatory the Poet-seer beheld any ghosts more awful than those living creatures who thus emerged into the light of day.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### RELEASE.

I FOUND myself shortly after our release sitting on the wet grass outside the veranda, in a stupefied condition, staring vacantly on the prostrate form of my patron, who was stretched at full length beside me. I think I had followed him and remained with him by a kind of instinct, which was something less than sense or affection; for my brain was dazed, and all that followed during this day, and several other days, seemed of the nature of a dream.

First came a vision of a spacious chamber, adorned with a certain barbaric splendour—the throne-chamber of a conqueror—roughly put together in a house half destroyed by cannon-shot;—a handsome brown face and glittering eyes, arched brows of deepest black scowling upon us under a jewelled turban, and round about us a crowd of grinning slaves and parasites, and the flash of arms, and the gaudy colouring of Moorish uniforms.

This is Suraja Doulah, before whom my patron has been brought to answer for his misdeeds, and to confess what he has done with the English wealth that is missing from the treasure chamber of the factory.

I hear a voice that is strange and yet familiar relating, in faint, broken accents, the horrors of last night; and, looking towards the speaker, see Mr. Holwell sitting on a heap of blun-



dered books, supported on each side by a Moorish sergeant, and with a countenance more ghastly than death.

The Sun of the State has neither time nor attention for this stupid recital of human agony.

"Tell me where the English treasure is buried," he cries savagely; "that there is hidden wealth in this place, I know; and you, who held the fort when the others had fled, doubtless helped to put it away. Lead my treasurer to the hiding-place, or, by the soul of the Prophet, you shall be blown from a cannon's mouth before sunset."

"Death, saheb, has no terror for me," answered Mr. Holwell calmly; "I suffered last night an anguish as many times worse than sudden death as there are grains in a handful of sand. Think not I fear death at the mouth of a cannon, or from the lash of a native executioner."

He then, with a most wonderful calmness, proceeded to assure the Soubahdar that none of the Company's money had been buried or hidden, and to explain how it happened that the treasury was so low at the time of the siege; how the greater part of the native merchandise had been shipped before the month of April, while the vessels containing our British importations had not yet arrived; and how we were thus as poor in goods as in cash,—which last was diminished by the large sums advanced to native factors, whose cotton-stuffs would only be ready in the ensuing year.

The tyrant listened, but half-convinced as I could perceive, and, with a muttered execration, ordered us from his presence as prisoners, in the charge of the general of the household troops.

Mr. Holwell reminded him of his solemn promise of honourable treatment; but this question he waived, and still harped upon the hidden treasure.

We were carried in a hackerry to the general's camp, which lay within the Morattoo ditch, and near Omichund's garden, full three miles from the fort. The rest of the survivors were set at liberty, with the exception of Mrs. Carey, our one female companion in that fatal death-chamber. This wretched creature—whose husband, a man of full half-it, had expired of suffocation—happened to be young and handsome. She was conducted at once to the Soubahdar's zenana; and by this one cruel instance, we may divine what fate would have awaited other Englishwomen had they been so unfortunate as to fall into the power of this Moorish profligate.

The dead were thrown promiscuously into the ditch of an unfinished ravelin, and hastily covered with the loose earth.

Arrived at the camp, we were loaded with fetters, and thrust, with two miserable companions—also members of the Company's civil service—into a sepoy's tent, four feet long by three wide, and about three feet high. Here we lay, half in and half out

of the tent. But although a heavy rain fell without ceasing all through the ensuing night, it was as a night in Paradise compared with the sufferings that had gone before.

My next vision is of a march under the burning sun, the march of four ghastly figures, heavily laden with fetters, scarce able to drag their weary limbs onward at the savage word of command. Then a night in an open veranda fronting the broad bright river, the four wretches still laden with irons, and guarded by a strong detachment of stalwart Mahometans—it is so probable these fever-stricken, fettered creatures will try to run away.

Now comes a journey in an open boat, a journey that seems endless. The four English wretches have broken out into boils, which spread all over their bodies like the boils of Job. The boat draws a good deal of water, and the four sufferers lie on a bed of wet bamboos. When the crew are negligent of baling, the sufferers wake from fitful feverish slumber to find themselves half under water. But after the Black Hole this is luxury: yes, even though no one of the sufferers can move his cramped and fettered limbs without inflicting exquisite tortures upon himself, or on his companions. These travellers are half naked, and for sole defence from sun, rain, and dew, possess a ragged bit of matting, which they begged as they were leaving the dock-head at Calcutta. Their diet is rice-water gruel.

And so up the noble river to the town of Hooghly, scarce a less ghastly burden than the corpses which piety sets afloat on the sacred waters. Forward again, with numerous misadventures, to Santipore, where our open boat broke down, and a request sent to the Zemindar for another boat was refused; and here, after incalculable sufferings endured by my patron, who was marched to the rebellious Zemindar ironed as he was, his legs streaming with blood, his body faint and exhausted by fever, fatigue, and pain, we were at last transferred to an open fishing-dingy. In this boat we endured a new torture from want of room, and so continued our voyage, which only ended on the afternoon of July 7th, having thus lasted thirteen days.

Much kindness had been shown us on our way, notably by Mr. Law, the manager of the French factory, who bribed our guards to indulge us, and provided us with clothes, linen, provisions, liquors, and cash.

We landed at Muxadavad, and after being marched as felons through the streets of the city, were deposited in an open stable near the Soubahdar's palace. Here we lay, closely guarded on one side by Moors, on the other by Gentoos, and almost stifled by the crowds of spectators, who came from all quarters of the city to stare at this pleasing show, and so blocked us in from morning till night that we narrowly escaped a second suffocation.

On the 11th of July the Soubahdar arrived at the city from Calcutta, which he had rechristened Allynuggur, the Fort of Ally,

in pious commemoration of his heroic victory. We were now moved from the stable to a bungalow, and flattered with hopes of speedy release. These hopes were, however, suddenly destroyed by the intelligence that the Soubahdar had determined upon sending us back to Calcutta in irons, to be delivered to the mercy of Manickchund, the new governor. My patron now abandoned himself to despair, protesting that we should never be got alive out of the hands of that Hindoo miser.

Seeing nothing but destruction before us, we dined with the desperate appetite of wretches doomed to immediate execution, and lay down to sleep with the lazy apathy of despair. From this slumber we were awakened suddenly by the chief of our guard, who told us the Soubahdar was approaching on his way to the palace. Resolved to appeal once more to this wretch, we entreated the guard to leave us free to see and be seen by him; and when the royal litter came abreast of our shelter, saluted the tyrant with the usual salaam.

Perchance some touch of pity was actually awakened in that brutal breast; or it may have been that Suraja Doulah was weary of torturing us, and was at last convinced of our poverty. He beckoned us to the side of his palanquin, stared at us inquisitively from head to foot for some moments, as at some curious spectacle, and then ordered the guard to strike off our irons and set us free.

It was all the work of a few minutes. We stood in the road staring at one another stupidly, until one of us burst into tears, and we fell upon each other's breasts and embraced as Englishmen rarely do in the most moving moments.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### I TAKE SERVICE WITH A NEW MASTER.

**AFTER** receiving hospitable entertainment and much kindness from the gentlemen of the Dutch factory, we started on our journey to Fulta, where the fugitives from Calcutta were now stationed. The care of our Dutch friends had done much to recover us; but we were still shattered in health and spirits, and mere shadows of what we had been before that fatal night of the 20th of June. At Fulta we found nothing but misery. The frightened creatures who had left Calcutta had fled for the most part without so much as a change of clothing, and were now herded together in the ships, where they slept on the decks, exposed to all the hardships of weather, and threatened on every side by death; for this part of the river is most unhealthy, and a malignant fever had already begun to decimate our countrymen when Mr. Holwell and I arrived at Fulta.

He spoke with considerable warmth of the folly the English

were guilty of in remaining at this miserable station one hour after the wind and weather permitted them to make for Madras.

"These people have a perfect genius for fatal mistakes," he said to me. "What could be easier for them than to push on to Madras? yet they stick here, at a constant waste both of life and money, since ships have to be kept here in order to protect them. They say that to leave the river would be to give up the cause for lost. It would be but abandoning a cause already lost, and lost by their own misconduct. *These* miserable creatures can do nothing to retake Calcutta; and whatever effort is to be made for its recapture would be assisted by our departure, as the Nabob would consider we had abandoned the notion as hopeless, and would thus be thrown off his guard."

The fugitives were, however, in no humour to listen to reason. They had lost everything. The wealth and independence for which they had toiled for years, the golden fruit of many a lucky speculation, the prize of many a bold adventure, had been snatched from them in a single night. Nothing could be more complete than the ruin of the English in Bengal at this juncture; and he must have been a bold visionary who could dream we should ever regain our footing there. Happily for us, there was *ONE* such daring dreamer; but not amongst the fever-stricken, despairing fugitives of Fulta.

Here we remained for five long dreary months, during which I had some occupation in assisting my patron to draw up a full and particular account of the defence and surrender of Fort William, together with the intrigues that preceded the Soubahdar's attack. This paper proved of great value to him afterwards, when anonymous slanderers, aided by the malice of a faction, would have stigmatized him as the chief cause of our troubles in the June last past.

This dismal interval gave me but too much leisure in which to brood over my private troubles, and above all to consider that strange piece of information which Philip Hay had volunteered in the Black Hole Prison. Whether that faithful-unfaithful companion of mine had outlived the 20th of June I knew not; but he had not yet appeared at Fulta, where most of the survivors had found their way, after receiving some kindness from Omichund, who was now high in the favour of Suraja Doulah, and who, in spite of his wrongs, had shown this much charity to the English.

"I have little doubt the wily old Gentoo betrayed us, Bob," said Mr. Holwell; "but when he moved the hidden spring of the machine that crushed us, he knew not how deadly an instrument he was setting in motion. The ruin he intended for us has engulfed his own treasures, and he has suffered alike in his affections and his pocket. But so long as he refills the last, I fancy he can bring himself to endure the wounds inflicted on the first.

They say he is in a fair way to get his money restored to him by the Soubahdar, and he seems to take the annihilation of his family with exemplary fortitude."

"Yet the Hindoos are an affectionate race, sir."

"True, Bob; but the man who gives his soul to the worship of lucre has no room for any other affection. Remember the inspired sentence: 'Thou canst not serve God and Mammon.' When Shylock has to choose between his daughter and his money-bags, be sure he will take the latter."

"I hope the English will not be so weak as to trust Omichund again, sir," I said.

"Trust him? No, Robert; but if we want his services we shall buy them. The man will sell Suraja Doulah to us, as he sold us to Suraja Doulah, if we can pay him his price. We English traders have never been over-particular in the choice of our tools. We should be more than human did we not sometimes take a lesson in political manœuvring from these unscrupulous Moors."

At Fulta I frequently saw the gentle Indian maiden whom it had been my good fortune to rescue from a violent end. The simple creature regarded me with so warm a gratitude as to shame my small and accidental service; but when I suggested some plan for conveying her back to her grandfather, she shrank affrighted from the idea of such a return. By her association with the English, and the performance of small menial duties in good Mrs. Witherington's service, she had lost caste; and she told me in all seriousness that her grandfather would rather have known her dead with the rest than so dishonoured a survivor.

"Let me stay with the good English lady," she pleaded; "and with the dear English babies who love me. They are sick, and they need Tara."

Sure I am that a more faithful nurse never watched a sick-bed than this dear girl. I was stricken with fever myself while I stayed aboard ship, and she tended me with unwearied devotion; a care so fond and tender that, had I not been bound heart and soul by the old hopeless love, I must needs have given her my affection, and formed one of those alliances which are of such frequent occurrence in this country.

Had I so pledged my heart and my honour, as God is my judge, I would have been true to the vows thus made, and would have scorned to repudiate a tie so holy, as I have but too often seen such ties repudiated by my countrymen.

One day during my slow recovery from the fever, some unconscious touch of tenderness in the Gentoo maiden's tone and manner awakened me to a sense of danger to her in this most innocent companionship. As her deliverer, she had been from the first inclined to regard me with a somewhat romantic feeling; and in the confusion of our wretched existence at Fulta we

two had been thrown more together than we could have been under any but such exceptional circumstances. Unintentionally to win this gentle heart, and wound it, would have been a real affliction to me; so, convinced that in such matters candour is ever wiser than diplomacy, I made some excuse for relating the story of my youth, and told Tara how I had loved, and how I had lost all dear to me in the home I had left so far away.

The passionate sorrow with which she heard the conclusion of my story showed me that my fancy had been no vain delusion of a coxcomb, and that plain-mannered, dark-faced Robert Ainsleigh had indeed been so unlucky as to win this tender heart. All that the affection of a brother could do to alleviate a grief which I was bound to respect, and in a manner ignore, I did; and my Indian maiden smiled as she parted from me. But from this time I carefully avoided any renewal of our familiar intercourse; and when I by-and-by left the wretched settlement, our parting, although affectionate, was of the briefest.

Mr. Holwell's property embarked in the *Diligence* Snow had all fallen into the hands of the enemy, and he now decided upon returning to England for the restoration of his shattered health. My own savings, the yearly residue of a very modest salary, and the result of two or three happy investments, had been confiscated with the effects of my patron, and I was now penniless. Thus, though I yearned to revisit England with a passionate longing, I felt myself constrained to remain in Bengal, since I could not with a decent grace ask the favour of my passage-money from Mr. Holwell's impoverished resources.

To stay behind seemed a dismal prospect, for my patron's departure would leave me without a friend. The fugitives of Fulta were all too much disgusted with their reverse of fortune to be capable of charity. Their sole delight consisted in quarrelling and recrimination; and until this period of my life I had no adequate notion of the pettiness to which humanity can sink when unsustained by fortitude.

"And these are Christian gentlemen!" I said to myself as I surveyed their sordid squabbles. "Oh, for a generous heathen, a Themistocles or a Cincinnatus, to show these paltry spirits how a great mind can rise superior to calamity!"

I have since thought that my own fortitude under the loss of fortune may possibly have been attributable to the fact that I had very little to lose, and that I may have been somewhat hard on these unhappy merchants, who had lost a great deal.

In imagining that my position would be utterly hopeless after my patron's departure, I had done that worthy gentleman much wrong. He was at once too kind and conscientious to leave me friendless, and a few weeks before he was to sail in the *Siren* sloop announced his intentions regarding me.

"I can scarce believe that the English in Bengal are com-

pletely ruined, Bob," he began, "though they deserve no better fate. By the help of Providence and Clive, I think we may weather the storm, always provided the committees of Madras and Fulta do not wreck the ship by their absurd jealousies and squabbles for precedence. Now in the event of Clive setting us on our feet again, be sure he will do it in a grand manner. The conqueror of Arcot is of the stamp of your antique heroes, and does everything on a large scale. So in the case of success there will be chances for a daring young fellow like yourself; and it is on this account that I mean to leave you in Bengal, though I at one time thought of taking you back to England with me."

"Oh, sir!" I gasped, my heart beating a hundred to the minute.

"Heavens, how the boy's eyes sparkle! And you would like to go back to England, and challenge Mr. Lestranger to mortal combat, and ride off with his blood upon your coat-sleeve to woo his widow? No, Bob, I have considered your story, and do not see that a return yonder would do you any good, while I am sure you may profit by remaining here."

"I will do whichever you please, sir," I answered with, I fear, an almost sullen resignation.

"Wisely spoken, Robert; and now for my plans. Your knowledge of the languages renders you a very valuable coadjutor to any man in a public post. I wrote some time ago to Watts, who is just now a kind of State prisoner at Chinsurah, telling him of my intention to return to England, and recommending you to his service in the same capacity you have held with me. Any fortunate change in our affairs will of course restore him to power; and in the meantime I have no doubt he is busy in some secret manner, since he has a rare talent for diplomacy. As I expected, he promptly accepts the transfer, and if you are content to be confidential secretary to Mr. Watts, instead of to John Zephaniah Holwell, the post is ready for you."

I thanked Mr. Holwell heartily for his consideration, and was very glad thus to obtain my release from Fulta, and to proceed as best I might up the river to Chinsurah, which station I reached early in December. Here I found Mr. Watts established, in a very doubtful frame of mind as to the prospects of the Honourable East India Company in Bengal; though he knew that Admiral Watson, with a small armament, was on his way to our rescue, and that, after much squabbling of committees and jealousy of brother-officers, Robert Clive had been finally accredited with full powers for the delivery of the English out of the hands of Suraja Doulah.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CLIVE TO THE RESCUE!

THE pains of disappointed avarice had embittered the tyrant's success at Calcutta. The pitiful condition of the treasury, and

the limited amount of merchandise which could be realized for for the royal plunderer after the daring depredations of his soldiery, had been a death-blow to his hopes. The native inhabitants of Calcutta had all contrived to make off with their treasures while the Soubahdar's army was on the road to the city, with the exception of the ill-fated Omichund; and the only prize in the shape of private fortune swallowed by the royal maw was forty thousand rupees and a variety of valuable effects belonging to this Gentoo merchant. Thus, that English caution which had imprisoned Omichund on the eve of the siege had thrown this large amount into the lap of our worst enemy.

Disgusted beyond all measure with the poverty of Calcutta, where he had perhaps expected a booty as great as Nadir Shah carried away from imperial Delhi, the Soubahdar consigned the governorship of the Fort of Ally to the Gentoo Manickchund, turned his royal back upon his conquest, and departed in search of new victories. In the month of October he achieved a rapid conquest of a rebellious relation, the Phoujdar of Purneah, and having seen this youth slaughtered, and his country reduced to submission, returned in triumph to Muxadavad, where he expressed himself convinced of our complete annihilation, assuring his low-born favourites that we were a very beggarly set of people, and that the whole of Europe did not contain ten thousand men.

From this blissful state of ignorance Suraja Doulah was disturbed by the news that Robert Clive and Admiral Watson had retaken Calcutta by force of arms, after a vain attempt to obtain its peaceful surrender from Manickchund. It had been almost a bloodless victory, for the might of Mahometan arms had fled panic-stricken at the aspect of British men-of-war, with British soldiers on board them, brightening the broad river with an awful glory, while to landward sounded the roar of Colonel Clive's artillery.

This capture had been achieved after a spirited skirmish in a green hollow, close by a deserted village of mud-huts, within a mile and a half of Buz-buzia, where the English were surprised asleep by Munickchund and his army. This surprise might have proved fatal for the English arms, had a lesser spirit than Clive's ruled the fortunes of the day. The men had dragged two field-pieces and a tumbril of ammunition through a swampy country, and had arrived at this halting-place, after a sixteen hours' march, worn-out with fatigue, and entirely ignorant of the enemy's vicinity.

Happily, Clive and British valour prevailed against strength and numbers immeasurably superior, and a ball chancing to come unpleasantly close to Governor Manickchund's turban, that distinguished Hindoo turned his elephant's head, and the whole army went lumbering back through swamp and jungle to the fort named in veneration of the god whose shrine was soon to be overthrown.



The 1st of January, 1757, witnessed the taking of Calcutta by Watson and Clive, a noble New-Year's gift, which the Colonel offered to the Directors of the East India Company, and for which, with all other benefits from the same daring hand, they showed themselves ungrateful in the future. Some ill-feeling was displayed between the naval and military heroes on this occasion, Admiral Watson allowing Clive to be rudely repulsed from the fort which he had helped to capture, and Clive asserting his own rights with his usual spirit.

The English flocked back to their once flourishing settlement to find a scene of desolation. The best houses had been demolished, or damaged by fire. A Moorish mosque, built with the materials of ruined English habitations, defaced the fort; all the prosperous native inhabitants had fled from the rapacity of Manickchund, and squalid poverty prevailed in every quarter. The private losses of inhabitants were roughly estimated at two millions.

Before January was over, Clive and his army, supported by the naval force, had taken Hooghly, a wealthy Moorish city, close to Chinsurah, whose inhabitants had been thrown into consternation by the capture of Calcutta, and were ill-prepared to resist a foe they had begun to consider invincible, so speedily do these Mahometans change from insolence to cowardice. We heard the cannon roaring as the ships battered the fort, and at nightfall were gladdened by the news of victory. This conquest gave the English army a handsome booty, and must have awakened the Soubahdar from his pleasant delusion respecting the insignificance of European arms.

Hooghly was scarce taken when news of the declaration of war between England and France arrived from Aleppo. These tidings Mr. Watts considered to the last degree alarming, and at once hastened to Calcutta, taking me with him, in order to be present at the meetings of the select committee. These gentlemen expected that the French forces at Chandernagore would at once join the Nabob, as it was well known that the ambitious Bussy thirsted for the extirpation of the English from Bengal, and for that extension of French empire which had been the daring dream of Dupleix.

Impressed with the belief that even British valour would be powerless against the combined forces of Suraja Doulah and Bussy, Clive at once wrote to Juggat Seit, the great Gentoo banker at Muxadavad, requesting his mediation with the Soubahdar, with a view to arranging a peace. Tidings of the capture of Hooghly happened, however, to reach the council-chamber at the same time as this pacific overture, and the mediator found the tyrant frantic with rage against the English plunderers who had sacked his town, and eager for an instantaneous march to Calcutta.

Hither he hurried, while Clive, hearing of his approach, made prompt preparations to receive him, and at once encamped his forces in a strong position on the outskirts of the settlement. To the native mind the very tidings of the Soubahdar's march carried panic. Neighbouring villages refused to send us our usual supplies, Bengalese troops deserted. We had but few bullocks for draught, and but one horse in the whole settlement, and he a stranger, brought from Madras.

Sorely doubtful of success, and as prudent as he was bold, Colonel Clive now wrote to the Nabob, inviting him to peaceful negotiation. The Nabob replied with vast cordiality, but continued his progress; and at daybreak on the 3rd of February the flames of burning villages reddened the sky to the northward, and the flash of arms and sound of barbarous music announced the approach of the Soubahdar's army.

Suraja Doulah encamped in Omichund's garden, leaving two-thirds of his army on the other side of the ditch, while the remaining third of his forces took possession of a raised causeway that crossed Morattoo ditch, and thus led into the Company's territory. When I perceived their position I could but wonder that Colonel Clive had suffered them to seize a post so formidable.

Having pitched his royal tent in Omichund's garden, no doubt at the invitation of the wily Gentoo, the Soubahdar held a durbar in full state. To this council came two of the Company's servants who were searched by the prince's prime minister, before entering his tent, lest they should carry hidden weapons wherewith to extinguish that light, the Sun of the State. These two English gentlemen, Mr. Scrafton and Mr. Walsh, found the Nabob surrounded by all his chief officers, and by a circle of scowling rascals of enormous stature, men of low birth, but much affected by the Sun of the State on account of their bulk and ferocious aspect.

These men sat frowning at our deputies throughout the audience; and Mr. Scrafton afterwards told me how he had at this juncture recalled to mind the murderous plot by which this young man's granduncle, Allaverdy, had beguiled the Morattoo general into his tent, there to slay him.

With the ever-present fear of assassination, our gentlemen ventured to remonstrate with the Nabob for his breach of courtesy in thus entering our settlement while he was beguiling Colonel Clive with offers of peace, and then handed his Mahometan highness a paper stating the proposals of the Company. This the Nabob perused in gloomy silence, and anon dismissing the assembly, after some rather alarming whispering between himself and his officers, bade our deputies repair to the tent of his prime minister, there to await a more private conference.

"Egad, Ainsleigh," said Mr. Scrafton, as he related the adventure to me next day, "I had a sensation as of cold water

trickling down my back the whole time I was in the yellow-faced heathen's presence, and I think had you seen those truculent scoundrels of his glaring at us from under their enormous turbans, you'd scarce wonder at our distaste for the situation. As we left the tent, that Gentoo rogue Omichund whispered us to take care of ourselves, with a look that I shall never forget. Once safe outside the Nabob's tent, you may be sure we did not go to the prime minister's. The invitation sounded too much like the farmer's wife's 'Dilly, dilly, come and be killed.' We bade our black servants extinguish the torches with which they had escorted us, preferring the shelter of darkness to so dangerous a distinction, made off for Perrin's redoubt as fast as we could scamper, and thence in safety to the camp."

It was the report of these two gentlemen that decided Colonel Clive upon an immediate attack; and about three o'clock in the morning of the 5th he marched out with the chief part of his force, assisted by five or six hundred seamen, who drew the artillery and carried ammunition. At six the English entered the enemy's camp in a thick fog. Had this fog cleared off after they had made themselves masters of the camp, the colonel would doubtless have successfully executed his bold design, which was to make his first assault upon a train of heavy artillery, spike the guns, and push straight forward to the Nabob's headquarters. But the fog thickening to a dense impenetrable darkness, threw our men into confusion, and Clive had a sharp contest with a strong body of the enemy, from which he withdrew the poorer by two field-pieces and an eighth of his small army. Yet, so poor a thing was this degenerate descendant of the hardy Tartar general, Allaverdy, that a skirmish, which Clive considered a defeat, struck terror to his craven spirit. He looked upon this night-attack on his camp as the extreme of desperate valour, and, while shivering in his jewelled shoes, roundly abused his officers for their arrant cowardice. His own losses had been indeed far greater than ours, many officers of distinction, with six hundred common soldiers, five hundred horses, four elephants, some camels, and innumerable bullocks, having perished in the struggle. It was with difficulty this cowardly prince, whose host of forty thousand strong could not sustain him against Clive and two thousand, was induced to spend a second night in such dangerous quarters. His whole army were on the watch from sunset to sunrise, and an incessant firing of cannon and small arms was kept up as a precautionary measure, lest we should again run our raid upon this host of Moorish heroes. It is strange how these eastern soldiers take their colour from the captain who leads them, and that the men who could achieve wonders of valour under grim old Allaverdy, prove the veriest cravens when a craven commands them. A Nadir Shah has but to plant his banner on Persia's

barren mountains, and a host of conquerors arise at his call. A Clive takes a handful of sepoy, and the Moorish legions shrivel like the jungle foliage before the rush of a conflagration. What is this subtle spirit of the master-mind which can thus infect battalions, this wondrous Promethean spark that from the breath of one man's nostrils can fire an army? Yet, when some man like Clive has made our arms victorious, there is always a little knot of cavillers ready to dispute his claim to praise or reward, while some small evening paper, the oracle of coffee-house macaronies, must have its little vapid sneer at the hero's achievements. I lived to see Robert Clive hated because, while pouring millions into the coffers of the East India Company, he had contrived to make his own fortune. I lived to read the complaint of one fine gentleman that, while the Roman conquerors were content with a garland of oak-leaves, our Indian hero had secured a handsome income. I lived to see that man who redeemed India from the hands of our mortal enemies turn indignantly upon his interrogators of the House of Commons, and tell them that had he been a sheep-stealer they could scarce have questioned him more insolently.

This is a long digression; but when I remember what I saw Robert Clive achieve in Bengal, and consider his experience of a commercial nation's gratitude, I am apt to grow warmer than becomes the writer of a sober chronicle such as this.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### FAST AND LOOSE.

THE tables were now turned, and the Nabob as eager for peace as he had been insolently neglectful of our advances. Swift was his retirement from the city whose capture six months before had so swelled his pride. The forty thousand black soldiers, with their train of elephants and camels, their herds of draught-oxen, their cymbals and clarions and gay barbaric banners, turned right-about face, and made the best of their way homewards.

A treaty was concluded, giving the English all they asked—the restoration of their factories, with such effects and moneys as had been brought to account in the books of the Nabob's government, the permission to fortify Calcutta, and the confirmation of all those privileges obtained by Mr. Hamilton, the English surgeon, from the Emperor Ferokehshere. Such was the happy result of Clive's bold invasion of the enemy's quarters.

While the Nabob's ponderous army was still on the road, a present of costly native dresses arrived for Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, according to the custom of this country, together with a proposal of alliance offensive and defensive against all enemies. This was precisely what the select committee and Colonel Clive desired, since Bussy's late successes in the Carnatic had brought the French power dangerously near to

Bengal, where they already possessed a considerable force at their settlement in Chandernagore. The Nabob's offerings were therefore accepted with all courtesy, and as much affection as if the one hundred and twenty-six unhappy creatures who perished miserably in the Black Hole prison had never been upon the face of this earth. Such Christian-like forgiveness and oblivion of past wrongs is doubtless a necessary element of state policy; yet while this alliance was making I could not but remember one unfinished ditch of the ravelin, into which an undistinguishable heap of corpses had been cast without so much as a murmured "requiescat in pace" from any Christian lips.

A handsome monument now surmounts that common burial-place of so much virtue, valour, and promise; but at this time of which I write the murders of the 20th of June were yet unavenged; nor did it seem any one's special business to avenge them. Indeed, I think this iniquitous sacrifice of life will make more impression on the minds of mankind in the pages of history than it ever produced on the inhabitants of Calcutta, many among whom I encountered some ten years afterwards who had not so much as heard the story of our sufferings on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

In my position as Mr. Watts's private secretary, I was present at an interview in which Colonel Clive expressed himself freely upon the subject of our European enemies.

"It is a question whether the French or the English are to be masters of Bengal," said the Colonel, whose face always darkened when he spoke of our famous rivals. "Be sure, Watts, there are no bounds to the ambition of Bussy; and if once he leaves the Carnatic he will make himself master of Suraja Doulah, who is as weak as he is cruel. Be sure of that. I trust this Mahometan tyrant about as much as I would trust a tiger I had just wounded. So long as the brute can scarce crawl he is at our feet; but give him power to spring, and he will be at our throats. His pledges of alliance will be cast to the winds if once he has Bussy's men at his back. He owes the French no grudge, you see, for they have not made him bite the dust as we have; and he is too short-sighted to consider that their conquests in the Carnatic would be repeated here at his expense. Rely on it, the time has come for decisive action. We must not suffer ourselves to be hoodwinked by a weak-minded boy's cunning. Chandernagore must fall."

No time was lost in preparing the ground. Omichund, who had been taken once more into favour with the English, was despatched at once to the Nabob, as the most suitable person to sound him upon the subject of an early attack on the French settlement, which would be impossible after the setting-in of the southern monsoon.

Omichund returned by-and-by with a somewhat unsatis-

factory account of the Nabob, who could not be brought to give a straight and clear assent to our wishes. He, however, affected excessive friendliness, requested that Mr. Watts might be appointed the Company's deputy at Muxadavad, and asked the loan of twenty English gunners to serve in his own artillery,—a trick intended to blind us to his treachery, as we had afterwards good reason to know.

This conduct of the Nabob's caused Mr. Watts to depart at once for Muxadavad, I going in attendance upon him. I think there can be little doubt the tyrant selected my new patron on account of his somewhat mild and peaceable temper, which had permitted the too easy surrender of Cassimbazar, an act that must needs have impressed the Nabob with an idea of Mr. Watts's weakness. He had before long reason to see with how perfect a heroism these placable natures can sometimes confront mortal danger.

Now followed a wearisome series of intrigues—a tangled skein, the threads of which passed through my hands. Omischund, who now affected an eager desire to serve the Company, had accompanied us to the capital, a vast and wealthy city, as populous as and much richer than London, but boasting little splendour of architecture, and no attraction in the matter of cleanliness. The streets are close and narrow, the drainage abominable; and while commercial enterprise and Oriental luxury combine to render the city a wonderful one, this populous capital has little beauty wherewith to captivate the eye of a European traveller.

When I had last visited the city it was as a prisoner in irons, scarce able to drag my tortured limbs to the shed where I was to lie. I came now under vastly different circumstances, and was luxuriously lodged with my patron in a house near the palace, and on the banks of the river, whence I went to the council-chamber very often, to carry letters and assist as interpreter at some solemn interview.

It would be idle to enter closely into the details of an intrigue which might seem trivial to the reader, though to us of life-and-death interest. The permission to attack Chandernagore was given and retracted many times; and it was obvious to Mr. Watts and myself that the friendship of the Nabob was with our enemies, and not with us. It was only after the receipt of a threatening letter from Admiral Watson, wherein the sturdy English sailor swore he would kindle such a blaze in Bengal as all the waters of the Ganges should not quench, that Suraja Doulah gave a reluctant consent to the siege. Even this tardy concession was no sooner yielded than it was revoked; but too late. The Admiral and the Colonel laughed at the revocation as an insolent folly; bigger vessels than had ever been seen so high up the the river were brought from

Calcutta and laid alongside the batteries of Chandernagore, while Olive had prepared the way for a naval victory by disabling the enemy's guns. It was no doubtful conquest. The French surrendered at discretion, and were treated with much generosity.

The fall of Chandernagore struck new terror to the coward soul of the Nabob, and increased by tenfold his secret anger against us. But this was no moment in which to show his teeth, since at this very time came the news that an army of Patans—that fearless and hardy race before whose audacity the greatest captains of the East have quailed—were marching upon his province of Behar. So the prince wrote complimentary letters to the Admiral and the Colonel, and treated Mr. Watts with unusual courtesy. He further evinced his friendship by offering Chandernagore to the English on the same terms as it had been enjoyed by the French; but he did not remove a division of his army which he had sent to Plassey, on the island of Cassimbazar, thirty miles from Muxadavad. In a word, he played fast and loose with us; and while protesting his fidelity, and pledging himself to protect our interests, he encouraged the French, whom we had beaten, to remain in Bengal, wrote secret letters to M. Law, the chief of the French factory at Cassimbazar, and languished for the coming of Bussy. We had shown ourselves his masters, and he hated us with a savage hatred.

It was not till this fact was patent, and the Soubahdar, in a fit of ungovernable rage, had threatened to impale Mr. Watts—a threat which my patron heard with supreme coolness—that we began to give ear to the hints of Omichund, who was a daily attendant at the Nabob's durbar, and had ears to hear the lowest whisper of intrigue, and a nose to scent the faintest breath of treason. This subtle scoundrel informed us that Suraja Doulah was detested as much as he was feared, even by his own chief officers, and scarce loved by the low favourites whose base-born feet he had allowed to trample on the necks of Moorish gentlemen.

"Why should the English wait and pray for my lord's consent to extirpate their enemies?" he asked of Mr. Watts. "Why should they hang upon his looks and exist by his pleasure; to be threatened one day with death, and the next caressed and complimented, with treachery more fatal than death? At Calcutta last year the English were weak, very weak; but they are strong to-day. Have they not Sabat Jung, the firm in war, as their leader? and whom shall they fear? It is no longer the time to crouch and crawl; the hour has come for them to strike. The Nabob is hated by all; yes, by all. He has imprisoned Manickchund, and made him pay a million of rupees for such poor profits as he may have obtained

in Calcutta." (Here my gentleman made a piteous face, as in compassion for his brother Gentoo, who was of his own kidney.) "He has offended Meer Jaffier; and in any contest between those two the army will stand by their paymaster and general. He has degraded his treasurer, Roydoulub, by subjecting him to the authority of his low favourite, Moonlol. The Seits fear him, though to them he is civil; for they know his greedy nature, and that it can scarce be long before his clutch shall fasten on their gold. Yar Khan Latty, an officer of some renown, is fast friends with the Seits. He has two thousand horse under his command. The Nabob must march with the chief part of his army against the Patans; he has sworn to exterminate the English on his return. Let Sabat Jung, your colonel, strike the first blow; and let the English join Yar Khan Latty, seize Muxadavad, and proclaim Latty Nabob. He will give them all favours they choose to ask. Give them? He will be their servant to do their bidding, if it were the surrender of half his kingdom.

Thus argued Omichund, doubtless tempted by splendid promises from Latty and the Seits, and ever ready to sell his soul to the highest bidder.

It was about this time that I ventured to speak to the old Gentoo upon the subject of his domestic bereavements. I found him very calm; but he displayed more feeling than I had expected to see in one who had so abandoned himself to the worship of Mammon. When I told him of his granddaughter's safety he was deeply moved, and thanked and blessed me with much agitation, and promised me a noble present. This, however, he contrived to forget; nor should I have cared to accept a rupee from his secret stores, so deep a contempt had I for his sordid nature, and so little faith in his sincerity.

He told me that Juggernaut Sing, his head jemadar, the wretch who had slaughtered thirteen unoffending women, was a distant kinsman of his own, a man of equal piety and courage, and it was evident from the whole tenor of his discourse that he considered the bloody act of this fanatical murderer excusable, if not laudable.

"Juggernaut is now at Calcutta," he said, "but just recovered from his wounds. He has a ferocious hate of the English; and it is but to please me he can be brought to live peaceably among them."

I remembered the ghastly face and blood-stained mantle of the man I had seen leading our enemies against Fort William, and the savage yell of rapture with which he had betrayed our weakest points to the foe.

At Omichund's request I wrote to Mr. Witherington, with whose family his granddaughter was now living at Calcutta, begging him to find some means of sending her safely to Muxadavad



In something more than a week the damsel arrived, having travelled by water; but on going to the landing-place to meet her I found the old man there before me. He had been on the watch for her during the last three days. He had a litter waiting, into which he hurried his granddaughter before she could speak a word to me. But when the bearers had carried her off to his house he lingered to thank me once more for her safety.

"You have redeemed an old man from desolation, and have given him a fresh object in life," he said; "Omichund may yet leave great-grandchildren behind him to inherit his wealth—if the Nabob should ever pay me the compensation he has promised for my losses in Calcutta," he added hastily.

I could scarce refrain from a smile at this, for I knew the Nabob had already paid this Gentoo miser half the promised compensation.

"You would perhaps have liked to speak to the maiden," he said presently; "but it is better not. She has already lost caste by her intercourse with your people, and, for the bigoted amongst us, is a pariah. But I have lived among English merchants, and learned to regard these things less strictly. There was once a time in which the wives and daughters of Hindostan mingled freely among strangers; but the Mahometans have taught us to distrust our women, and to hide the brightness of our homes."

With this he departed; and by-and-by, as I walked homewards through the narrow streets, sweltering in the hot breeze of noontide, I looked wistfully at the closed shutters of the merchant's dwelling, behind which my tender little Hindoo maid was perchance watching. No, I had never loved her. That one pale English face, enshrined in my heart of hearts, was an image not to be blotted out by all the houris of Ind:—but she had loved me; and a man must be made of a hard material who has not some chance moment of dangerous tenderness for the girl who has loved him in vain.

It was with a feeling of extreme pain that I heard, a few weeks after this, the tidings of Juggernaut Sing's arrival in Muradavad, and of a marriage between him and his master's granddaughter. It seems that the Brahmins, to whom the fanatic youth had confessed and defended his deed of slaughter, had approved the crime; and Omichund did not shrink from bestowing his grandchild upon the man whose hands were red with her mother's blood. But what human affection can be expected from a people whose devilish creed teaches them to cast their babes beneath the murderous wheels of Juggernaut, and make a family of children motherless by the burning alive of an unoffending widow?

Of the poor girl's feelings I scarce dared think; and when I remembered our friendly companionship at Fulta, and the

tender devotion with which she had watched my sick-bed, my heart bled sorely for her griefs. Had it been possible to have saved her in any desperate manner from a fate to my mind so terrible, I would have hazarded the attempt; but Mr. Watts's counsel and my own reflections alike convinced me that her rescue was impossible.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHILE Omichund's intrigue with Khan Latty was yet in the bud, a new and much more important pretender presented himself in the person of Meer Jaffier, commander-in-chief of the Nabob's forces, a man of years and experience, who had stood high in the estimation of Allaverdy, and to whom that wise ruler had given his sister in marriage. An Armenian, called Petrus, a man that had been employed as a messenger between ourselves and Suraja Doulah in the negotiations of February last past, now came to Mr. Watts on behalf of Meer Jaffier, who declared himself pushed to rebellion in sheer self-defence, since he never entered the durbar but with the dread of being assassinated. Meer Jaffier was ready to promise anything, and Mr. Watts made haste to acquaint Clive with his offers, whereupon there commenced a revolution destined to end most happily for our English interests.

I will not follow all the windings and intricacies of this eastern plot and counterplot. Subtlety and falsehood were the order of the day, and the Nabob alternated between loud-spoken distrust and smooth-tongued conciliation of ourselves and Meer Jaffier, who played his cards, however, with extraordinary skill, and contrived to fool his weak master to the very last. It was a period of incessant letter-writing between Mr. Watts at Muxadavad and the select committee at Calcutta, and my post of secretary was a laborious one, leaving little time in which to think of private troubles and anxieties. So critical indeed was our situation, that there were many nights on which my patron and I lay down to rest not knowing whether we should be alive in the morning. It was very well for the gentlemen at Calcutta to be easy as to the result of our intrigue: we were in the lion's den, and knew that in any luckless hour the brute's ravenous jaws might open to devour us. I am happy to say, however, that we faced all dangers coolly, and asserted the interests of our honourable masters with as calm a front as if we had been safe in the council-chamber of Leadenhall Street.

The Nabob's army was still encamped at Plassey, while Clive, by the advice of Meer Jaffier's party, had withdrawn his forces to Calcutta, the better to lull the tyrant into a false security. But Suraja Doulah, by nature the most cowardly of mankind, was

a prey to perpetual suspicions, now turning upon us, now upon Meer Jaffier, as ready to cringe as to assassinate, and knowing not whom to trust or whom to destroy. His spies lurked in every quarter of the province, and traded alike upon his fears and his ignorance; one day making him believe that the English army lay concealed in the factory of Cassimbazar, and the next deluding him with the hope that a French fleet was about to avange Madras.

Urged by his ever-increasing fear of Clive, he sought a reconciliation with Meer Jaffier, whom he had lately treated with the utmost ignominy, and sent him, with fifteen thousand men, to reinforce his prime minister, Roydoulub, at Plassey. Meer Jaffier, afraid to refuse, was thus compelled to leave Muxadavad while the plot was hatching, but left his agent Petrus behind, in daily, and sometimes hourly, correspondence with my patron, Mr. Watts.

The articles were now drawn up which were to pledge Meer Jaffier in the event of his success. They were to include all that had been promised by Suraja Doulah, and one clause of extreme advantage to the English, whereby the future Nabob agreed to pay a sum of money sufficient to make good all the losses which had been sustained by the Company and by individuals at the taking of Calcutta. Meer Jaffier, with the generosity of an adventurer who has as yet nothing to lose and all things to gain, readily agreed to these articles, but stipulated that the plot should be kept secret from that Gentoo intriguer, Omichund.

This last condition was perplexing. The old man had been hanging upon our footsteps ever since he had broached the subject of Yar Khan Latty's pretensions, and had pressed us closely for a definite answer. For some time he had, I know, suspected us, too well versed in the art of prevarication to be deluded by an Englishman's less subtle falsehoods. He came in upon us suddenly, on the very day after Petrus brought us Meer Jaffier's message, livid with rage, and told us that we had been trifling with him, and that he knew the secret game we were playing.

Of all men about the Soubahdar's court this was the one whose influence my patron most dreaded. He saw that Omichund knew something of our secret, and that to obey Meer Jaffier's desire would be to provoke his vengeance. After binding him to secrecy he therefore confided the details of our enterprise, which Omichund heard with pretended approval. But I had now known this old man for some years, and had made a close study of his countenance. I watched him attentively throughout this conversation, and saw quite enough to assure me that he did not forgive us for the endeavour to deceive him, and that in his heart of hearts he cherished a most malignant hatred of us.

Soon after this came news from Calcutta of the arrival of a

messenger from Hyderabad, a stranger called Govinderoy, who brought a letter purporting to be written by Ballejee-Rao, the general of the Morattoes, offering to invade Bengal with a hundred and twenty thousand men within six weeks after he should receive the invitation of the English governor. The letter was suspected to be a trap set for us at the instigation of Suraja Doulah; and Clive, ever ready in expedients, advised the committee to forward the letter to the Nabob, affecting a belief in its authenticity. By this means, should the letter be indeed a trick, the tables would be turned upon the trickster; while, if it were genuine, no act could be more adapted to soothe him into a confidence in our friendship.

The treaty which Mr. Watts and myself had sketched out with infinite pains and very close calculations was now submitted to the committee at Calcutta. The sum therein demanded for the restitution of all losses amounted in all to seventeen millions of rupees; but this sum, large as it appears, did not seem sufficient to the gentlemen of the Calcutta committee, who cherished an extravagant notion of the wealth in Suraja Doulah's treasury, an idea founded rather on the mythical wonders of the "Arabian Nights" than on the possible revenues of the tyrant, whose predecessor's reign had been one of constant turmoil and expenditure.

Determined that Meer Jaffier should pay for his elevation, the committee asked a donation of five million rupees for the squadron and army, while Mr. Watts was also recommended to request a handsome tribute for each of the gentlemen of the committee.

These preliminaries being settled, we awaited the final blow, not without a terrible uncertainty of mind; for the spies of Suraja Doulah slept not, and the shadow of death hovered very near us during this most critical period.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### OMICHUND THROWS OFF THE MASK.

THE time was now come in which the Gentoo deceiver Omichund was to reveal himself for the first time in his true colours. I have already described the lurking doubt which had ever been entertained of his sincerity by Mr. Holwell and myself, and afterwards by Mr. Watts; but he was now to throw off the mask, and boldly declare himself a villain.

It was when matters were at the most perilous crisis—the Nabob's army encamped at Plassy fifty thousand strong, and Clive prepared to march from Calcutta so soon as the treaty was signed—that this avaricious scoundrel came one morning to my patron, and rudely insisted upon an interview. His usual cringing manner was exchanged for an audacity which

threatened mischief. He began at once to talk of the confederation, and our hopes of success.

"I have come fresh from the durbar, Mr. Watts," he said, "and the countenance of the Nabob was not pleasant to look on. He has spies, saheb, many spies; and he suspects. It needs but one word, one hint of the truth in his ear, and before the echo of the voice that spoke it had died away in the hall of his palace, the messengers of death would be on their way hither. Have you ever considered that the game we are playing is one in which we stake our heads?"

"I have never esteemed my life especially safe in this country," my patron answered with admirable coolness. "But what does this preface mean, my good Omichund?"

"It means that if you, saheb, hold your life at a trifle, I set some value on mine, and expect a handsome recompense for the mortal peril which I have undergone daily, hourly, within the last month, in the service of your people at Calcutta."

"You cannot suppose that your services will go unrewarded."

"I do not know that. When I served you a year ago—as I did, faithfully—your people at Calcutta rewarded me with a prison. They made me a prisoner, saheb, for the groundless suspicion; and while the rest of my countrymen had ample leisure to decamp with all their possessions, my hard-earned wealth was sacrificed: and that I owe to the English. The women of my household were slaughtered: that also do I owe to the English. Yet these bitter wrongs do I forget, when Sabat Jung has given you back your settlement, and I try to serve you—because, though they have ill-used me, I believe the English are faithful, and will keep promise or treaty that they make. My fortunes are broken, and I am labouring to restore them. I have served you well, saheb, and there have been many times when the Nabob would have had you slain without mercy had he not been beguiled by me to trust you a little longer. To do this, I have risked my life daily, and shall continue in the same peril so long as I remain in this city. I must have my reward. It must be no promise of the lips—a breath which the evening wind blows away. It must be written in the treaty. The reward that I am to have must be written there, in words that no man can misunderstand."

"Such a proposal is somewhat insulting to your employers," replied Mr. Watts; "but I do not suppose the gentlemen of the committee will object to your name being set down in the treaty between them and Meer Jaffier. Pray at what amount do you estimate your services?"

Omichund smiled in a thoughtful manner before replying to this plain question.

"I have to remember that without my mediation the Nabob would never have been reconciled to the English. Ever since

the capture of Calcutta I have been the secret friend of your countrymen; not because I have reason to love them, but because—nay, saheb, no man is bound to reveal his motives. It is enough that I have served you. 'Twas I who pleaded with Surajah Doulah for the miserable survivors of the 20th of June, and gave them food and shelter at Calcutta, where they might have remained with impunity, but for the folly of an English soldier who killed a Moor in some drunken quarrel, an act that led to the banishment of every Englishman from the settlement. Yes, saheb, I have been your friend, but my experience does not teach me to hope much from British gratitude. I have a better claim to the reward I ask than past services."

"What is the nature of that claim, Omichund?"

"My power to destroy you!" cried the old traitor, with a sudden energy that struck us dumb. He stood for some moments watching our faces with a malignant grin upon his own. Then slowly extending his brown skinny hand, he looked downward at the outspread fingers with a smile of triumph. "See here, saheb," he said, "in these fingers I hold the threads of your intrigue. It needs but a motion of my hand and they are entangled hopelessly. In this palm I hold your lives—yours and your secretary's yonder, and the lives of many more—and by the closing of this hand can destroy you. What, gentlemen! how pale you look! And yet I do but remind you of my power; to speak is not to act. Do you think Omichund would betray his patrons—even though they once betrayed him—and though but the other day you sought to fool the poor old Gentoo? No, Mr. Watts, saheb, I do not threaten; I ask only that when others are remembered my reward may not be forgotten."

"Put your demand in plain figures," replied Mr. Watts, somewhat coldly; "I do not comprehend this violent language, nor the looks with which you have accompanied it."

"The treasury of Bengal is accounted rich, and if Meer Jaffier mounts the musnud, my honourable masters will profit by millions. For my share I claim five per cent. upon the Nabob's treasures in specie, and the fourth path of his jewels."

This demand was made with a most consummate coolness of tone and manner, and having thus stated his claim the old Gentoo stood before us with downcast eyelids and folded hands, the very picture of meek honesty. But beneath the shrivelled lids I could discern the piercing black eyes casting furtive glances at my patron's face. The proposition was so monstrous that Mr. Watts stood for some minutes aghast, more struck by the enormity of this demand than by the iniquity of the threat that had preceded it. Treachery of the blackest hue is so common a thing among these Orientals that the diplomatist must be indeed unversed in their politics who can be surprised by

any new revelation of it. But there is a height of impudence more astounding than baseness, and of such impudence this proposal of Omichund's was a flagrant example.

My patron drew a long breath, and after that first movement of surprise refrained from any expression of his feelings.

"My good Omichund," he began quietly, "I thought your commercial experience would have saved you from the folly of so childish a proposal. You ask five per cent. on the Nabob's money—a fourth of his jewels! Are you aware that the jewels alone are rated at forty-five millions sterling?"

"Yes, saheb; by children and fools. The royal jewels are worth four-and-a-half millions at most."

"And of this amount you would claim a fourth?"

"Yes, saheb," replied the Gentoo, with a grave reverence of his head, and with the sober air of an honest tradesman who respectfully defends a disputed charge in his bill.

"Well, my good friend, you cannot be accused of neglecting your interests, or rating your services at too low a figure," said Mr. Watts with his easiest air; "and I thank you for your candour. But you see I have no real authority in this business. I am here only as a mouthpiece and communication for the gentlemen at Calcutta. I will refer your demands to the select committee there in my next letter, and we shall see how they treat them."

"You do not think the gentlemen at Calcutta will refuse my claim, saheb?" asked Omichund, with a somewhat sinister look.

"I cannot venture a guess as to their reply; but I am sure they will do whatever they consider just and liberal."

"And the treaty, saheb? The sum to be paid to me must be set forth in a special clause of the treaty. Let the gentlemen at Calcutta understand I will be satisfied with nothing less than that."

"I will tell them as much. You are now at liberty to leave us, Omichund."

The old man honoured us each with a profound reverence, and quitted the chamber. We heard him groan faintly as he put on his shoes and shuffled away on the smooth marble pavement—a groan as of lamentation over the iniquity of the English.

My patron walked to the doorway, looked into the corridor to make sure there was no spy lurking without, and then returned to me with a very grave expression of countenance.

"Robert Ainsleigh," he said, "if you set any value upon your life, you must leave this place to-night."

"Why, sir?"

"Because the Calcutta committee will refuse to accede to that scoundrel's extortionate demands, and, as surely as they do, he will betray you and me to Suraja Doulah. To-night you can leave this place unsuspected as the bearer of a letter to Calcutta; a few nights hence flight may be impossible."

"And you think that I would leave you, sir, in such a time of danger? No, if I valued existence at its utmost price, I do not believe I could be so base as that; and my life is not a treasure that I care to defend. Let them impale me to-morrow, and there is scarce a creature living to lament my fate. I thank you heartily for your consideration, sir; but, by your leave, I will remain to see the end of the play, whether it prove a comedy or a tragedy."

"I fear the last act will be bloody, Robert."

"It cannot be worse than the Black Hole, sir. But surely, with Colonel Clive at our back, we may master this Gentoo scoundrel? Cannot the committee finesse the question of his claim?"

"I doubt their power to do so. Satan himself is not more versed in guile than this Gentoo plotter. You see he declines at the outset to accept any verbal pledge. He will have his reward set down in the treaty to be signed, sealed, and delivered between ourselves and Jaffier. I can see no safety, Robert, but in compliance; and I do not believe that the committee would comply. We have already pushed our demands upon Jaffier to the utmost limit; and to ask for nearly another million might be the ruin of our cause. Remember, it would be as easy for Jaffier to ally himself to the French as to us. Bussy is ever ready to adopt any pretender who can promise him an extension of power; and to provoke Jaffier by extortionate demands might be to throw him into the arms of our enemies."

The letter communicating Omichund's demands was written and despatched to Calcutta, and we had but to wait the issue of this affair, and of all other knots and entanglements in the skein of intrigue, with what tranquillity we might. It was on the second night after the despatch of the letter that we received, through a singular channel, a new revelation of this villain's iniquity. The house in which we lived lay on the river-bank, in a small garden that adjoined the splendid grounds of Herant-jel, the Nabob's palace, a fortified building surrounded by towers provided with cannon. I was lounging here in the summer darkness, well-nigh worn out by the anxieties and suffocating heat of the day, when a little boat shot along the stream and ran under the bank where I walked. A cloaked and hooded figure, very small and slender, stepped out of the boat and approached me.

I expected to see some youthful dervish come to solicit alms; but, on drawing quite close to me, the stranger uttered a timid greeting, and I recognized the accents of Tara.

It was but a few weeks since her marriage, after which event I scarce hoped ever to see her again.

"Robert, saheb," she began—she had learned my Christian name from Mr. Holwell, who never addressed me by any other, and I doubt if she knew that I owned a surname,—“Robert,



saheb, I have come to warn you of a great danger. I have come secretly, with much difficulty; and I think my husband would kill me, as he killed the others, did he know that I could so degrade myself. But can I forget how you saved my life, saheb, or how happy I was on board the English ship when the English doctor said my care had saved yours? No, Robert, saheb, I cannot forget those days: they stand apart from my life. I have no share in their brightness now, and my life seems all dark—so dark that I long to die and pass into a new world, where I shall be purified from my sins, and so pass on through other worlds of purification to the heights of heaven, where the great God is happy for ever among the happy angels who serve him. We have a Brahmin who lives in the house and reads the Shastah to us every day, and his words give me comfort when my heart is heavy."

"My darling!" I involuntarily exclaimed in English; and I am happy to think this innocent Hindoo did not understand the import of the word, which she no doubt took to be some term of ceremony; "alas! I fear you are not happy?" I continued in Bengalee.

"I am as happy as we ought to be in a world of purgation, saheb. But it is not to speak of myself I came hither. You are in danger, you and the other English saheb. My grandfather is angered against you. He says that Mr. Watts and the English mean to cheat him; but that he will be the death of you all if you play him false. He is not easy in his mind. He is pale, and walks about the house all day, and hurries backwards and forwards to the Nabob's palace like an evil spirit; and last night, when he knew not that I was within hearing, I overheard him tell my husband that he and Roy-doulub, the Nabob's treasurer, had sworn to each other to secrete and divide between them a great part of the royal treasure before the new Nabob comes. But that is nothing. It is your life that is in danger, Robert saheb, and you must leave the city at once. You see how dear your life is to me, when I betray my grandfather for your sake; but I know that you English sahebs will not hurt the old man."

This last speech was made in all simplicity, for Tara was innocent as a child. I thanked her heartily for her devotion, but told her that it was impossible for me to leave Muxadavad for some time to come. This so distressed her that I was obliged to temporize, and promise I would fly from the threatened danger, for the dear girl was imperilling her own life by remaining with me, and I was eager to see her return home. The boatman who had brought her had been bribed to fidelity by the gift of one of her gold ornaments. This I redeemed from him by a handsome donation, and urged him to conduct her in safety to the garden landing-stage a little way down the river.

whence she had come. I have the quaint Indian bangle still amongst my dearest treasures, a memorial of this perilous time and the affection that would fain have protected me from danger.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE TWO TREATIES.

SOME days elapsed before the arrival of a reply to the letter which Mr. Watts had written to Colonel Clive, setting forth in detail the iniquitous demands of Omichund. When Robert Clive's answer did come, I was at the first blush scarcely less astonished by it than I had been by the Gentoo's most impudent demand.

"I have received your last letter," wrote he, "and I must confess the tenor of it surprised me much. I immediately repaired to Calcutta, and, at a committee held, both the admirals and gentlemen agree that Omichund is the greatest villain upon earth, and that now he appears in the strongest light, what he was always suspected to be, a villain ingrain. However, to counterplot this scoundrel, and at the same time to give him no room to suspect our intentions, enclosed you will receive two forms of agreement, the one real, to be strictly kept by us, the other fictitious. In short, this affair concluded, Omichund will be treated as he deserves."

"Well, Ainsleigh," said Mr. Watts, after he had permitted me to read this letter, "what do you think of the colonel's plan?"

"It is a bold expedient, sir; but—do you consider it an honourable one?"

"No," replied my patron, "between man and man such a trick would be a consummate treachery. But remember that we deal here with nations. Omichund has it in his power not only to betray you and me, but to destroy the English in Bengal."

"Since we are so completely in his power, sir, would it not be best to give him his price, and suffer him to enjoy his ill-gotten gains, and the ignominy they will carry with them?"

"That is offering a premium to iniquity. You talk like a boy, my dear Ainsleigh. Is a man to make near a million of money by a stroke of treachery the most infamous ever hatched in the mind of a traitor? Were the sum less important, we might consent to his cheating Meer Jaffer, for remember it is from the future Nabob the money is to be plundered. I swear that Clive's notion is a masterstroke of genius. That man is all genius—in politics or in war he shines alike resplendent. His diplomacy is as intuitive as his military skill. Great heavens—what a man—and he came to Madras scarce thirteen years ago as a clerk!"

"Yet I wish with all my heart he had hit upon any other plan than this, sir."

"So do I, Robert; but you see it is just because there is no other plan possible that this expedient is a masterstroke. That scoundrel pushes us into a corner. 'I will have my name in the treaty for close upon a million sterling, or I will betray you,' he says. He shows no mercy, you see; and we reply, 'Very well, you shall have your name in a treaty;' but we do not say what treaty; and so the trickster will be nicely tricked. Do not ask me to pity him, Robert. It is but a puling sentiment that can plead for such a harpy. The wretch is rolling in wealth already. He has obtained half the hoarded rupees plundered from his house, and is now trying to extort the other half from Suraja Doulah's treasury. He will have full restitution of his losses in Calcutta, with the rest of the sufferers, native as well as English, should the revolution succeed. And are you going to plead for him because his treachery fails to extort an extra million? I tell you the man's greed of gold is a monomania; give him a million to-day, and you will but render him the more eager for another million to-morrow. A fictitious treaty! Yes, Robert, it is the only possible means of securing us from this scoundrel's treachery."

Reflection convinced me that Mr. Watts was right, and that a situation of peril so exceptional, a traitor so far beyond all common traitors, justified a deceit as desperate as that proposed by Clive. How this act may appear to the judgment of after-ages I know not; but it is scarce possible that the rigid moralists who may point to this deed as a blot upon Robert Clive's character should realize the difficulties of our position at this crisis. I have lived to hear the Colonel's policy in this matter questioned, as almost every other step in the career that gave India to England has been questioned; and to hear his bold justification of the deed. "I would do it again a hundred times," he told the Committee of the House of Commons; and though his humanity compassionated the disappointed miser's hapless ending, I think he gloried in the recollection of having successfully cheated so base a cheat.

Conciliated, and half-convinced by the apparent friendliness of the course which Clive had taken with regard to the Morat-toe letter—a genuine document, and calculated to alarm his fears—Suraja Doulah at last consented to withdraw his army from Plassey, and Meer Jaffier returned to the capital at the head of his fifteen thousand troops. He was coldly received by the Nabob, whose insolence of manner so alarmed him that he withdrew to his palace in fear and trembling, not knowing what discoveries might have been made by Suraja Doulah during his absence. The frown of a despot is a menace of death, and Meer Jaffier knew the ways of his countrymen too well to be blind to his danger. So fearful was he of exciting suspicion, that he refused to confer in private with Mr. Scrafton, whom

Colonel Clive had despatched to Muxadavad to explain the particulars of the two treaties, real and fictitious, and would only give him a hurried interview in his public audience-chamber.

All was now prepared for the final blow, and our chief anxiety at this crisis was to get rid of Omichund, who, as he had boasted, did but too surely hold the lives of us all in his power, and who at any moment might, by some diabolical chance, get wind of our intention to deceive him. He was a creature all eyes and ears, a plotter by nature, and so greedy of gain that he would at any moment hazard the chances of our great enterprise in the hope of some immediate profit to himself. He had done this more than once already, by carrying to the Nabob false tales of our designs against him, calculated certainly to throw him off the real scent, but also calculated to keep him in a state of alarm and watchfulness most inimical to our plans.

For such artful inventions Omichund had received either immediate payment, or promises of future reward. We knew not what mischief his lying tongue might do us if he remained longer a hanger on of the Nabob's council-chamber, and Mr. Watts and Mr. Scrafton laid their heads together to withdraw him to Calcutta.

I think the promise of gain would have tempted him to descend into the Brahminical hell; and when it was made clear to him that there was money to be picked up at Calcutta in payment of his services there, he agreed to return with Mr. Scrafton, and Mr. Watts and myself had the pleasure of seeing him depart in his palanquin in that gentleman's company.

Mr. Scrafton related to us afterwards, with mingled laughter and vexation, the difficulties of his journey—how, on the travellers reaching Cassimbazar, the old Gentoo was missing, and how, on messengers being despatched back to the city in search of him, he was found sitting at midnight in the Nabob's treasury, trying to extort from Mohun Lall, the favourite, some more of the money he had been promised as a reward for his lies about the English. Here the messengers were fain to wait until the harpy had assured himself there was nothing to be extorted from the inflexible Mohun Lall, when they packed him into his palanquin and bore him off in triumph to Cassimbazar, whence they continued their journey at two o'clock in the morning. But at daybreak Mr. Scrafton, awaking from a peaceful slumber, had the mortification to discover that his tiresome charge was again missing, and this time, not knowing where to look for him, had no help for it but to wait upon the road-side until three o'clock in the afternoon, when the old man returned from Plassey, whither he had stolen off to confer with Roydoulub, who had told him that no stipulation had been made for him in the negotiations with Meer Jaffier.

Alarmed to the last degree by this assertion, the old plotter

pushed Mr. Scrafton with the closest questions; but this gentleman was happily able to baffle him without trouble.

"You see I had only to tell the old scoundrel the truth," he said to us, in relating the adventure; "which was that Roydoulub could not possibly know the particulars of the treaty, since Mr. Watts had not yet communicated the ultimate form of the agreement even to Meer Jaffier himself. Convinced by this, he consented to continue his journey, and we jogged on in peace, though I rarely woke from a nap without expecting to miss Omichund's palanquin, and find he had played me some new trick. At Calcutta he was received with amazing cordiality; but even this could not quite conquer his suspicions, for he was seen in secret conference with our Persian scribe; but this fact luckily reached the Colonel's ears, the scribe was employed only to draw up the *fictitious* treaty. Thus, you perceive, if Omichund had bribed the scribe to tell him the contents of the document—which there is little doubt he had done—he would be only the more surely deceived."

One difficulty, and one only, had transpired in the preparation of this fictitious treaty, and that arose from Admiral Watson's peremptory refusal to sign it.

"Attach my signature to a lie!" cried the fiery old tar; "not for the wealth of a hundred treasuries as rich as Suraja Doulah's!"

In vain did Colonel Clive and the other gentlemen of the committee argue the point, and explain the necessity of the case. The sailor was inflexible.

"I don't know what honour may mean among you military and commercial gentlemen," he said somewhat rudely; "but if *that* is in your estimation an honourable deed for an Englishman to witness, I must tell you plainly we Jack-tars have a different notion of fair dealing. No, Colonel; you must manage this business without me. I had sooner cut off my hand than sign that paper."

This is a faithful record of the conversation as it was reported to me. I have since heard it stated that Admiral Watson, though he refused to sign his name to the treaty, gave full consent to his autograph being forged. But even in justification of my favourite Clive, whom I believe to have been a great and good man, I cannot bring myself to credit a statement so opposed to reason. All I can tell is, that Admiral Watson's signature *was* forged, and the fictitious treaty thus completed.

After the necessary delay caused by the wearisome slowness of Indian travelling,—how different from those wonders of speed, our English stage-coaches, which perform a journey of fifty miles between sunrise and sunset!—a native messenger arrived with the two treaties, the real one written on white paper, the false on red.

And now my patron had to arrange a secret conference with Meer Jaffier, whereat the agreement between him and the English might be executed. This was a matter of no small difficulty. Suraja Doulah's suspicions never slept, and they had been but lately aroused against Meer Jaffier. Any open communication between the latter and ourselves was therefore impossible. After much deliberation, my patron hit on a favourite Oriental stratagem. He ordered his palanquin, and caused himself to be carried to Meer Jaffier's palace, with me in another palanquin, securely shrouded by the silken curtains of the litters, and guarded by our servants, on whose fidelity we could fortunately rely. The palanquins of women are always regarded with respect, and ours were so arranged as to look like the closely-curtained litters of some eastern beauties. In this guise we were carried straight to the pretender's zenana, where it is likely the breath of slander may have followed us, but we were safe from a suspicion of the truth.

We found Meer Jaffier and his son Meeran alone in the spacious apartment where our bearers deposited us. The elder man seemed to me a shrewd and sagacious person; but in the countenance of the younger I perceived that savageness of nature which he was too soon to exhibit.

An ample explanation took place between Mr. Watts and Meer Jaffier. The latter reluctantly confessed that in all his master's army there were but three thousand horse on whom he could rely, a somewhat small subtraction from an army of fifty thousand. Should the scene of action be this city, Meer Jaffier promised to attack the Nabob's palace at the first signal of strife. Should a battle take place on the plain, his conduct must of course be ruled by the position he might occupy. If in the van, he would advance with drums beating and standard flying at the approach of the English, and pass over to their right with all his men; if in the rear, he would display a white flag, set upon the main body of the Nabob's army as soon as the English began the attack, and if possible take him prisoner.

These explanations made, Meer Jaffier held a copy of the Koran on his own head with one hand while he laid the other on the head of his son, and with the papers outspread before him, swore, "by God, and the prophet of God," to be faithful to the treaty. It was an awe-striking ceremonial, and I wondered, as I beheld it, to think how lightly these Mahometans can break vows so solemn; yet when I bethought myself of those venal wretches who pace Westminster Hall with straws in their shoes, ready to bear false witness for the smallest consideration, I was less inclined to marvel at eastern perfidy.

The messenger who had brought the treaties carried them back to Calcutta; and now, my patron's business being concluded at Muxadavad, it was high time that he should consider

his personal safety. To this he had shown a noble indifference from first to last; and though he had received several warnings of danger, he had refused to abandon his post until a special letter from Clive should set him at liberty.

For this letter of release he was still waiting when a secret messenger came to us at sunset from Meer Jaffier, bidding us instantly leave the city, as the Nabob's suspicions were now thoroughly aroused, and he might at any moment open fire on the palace of his traitorous commander-in-chief, when doubtless he would also take speedy means to revenge himself upon any English plotters within convenient reach of bowstring or stake.

The warning was of so peremptory a nature that it would have been worse than folly to disregard it. Mr. Watts therefore bade me pack his papers in the smallest compass, and carrying no more than these and a change of linen, we set out at night for the factory at Cassimbazar, as it were on a business visit; but with the fixed intention to return no more to Muxadavad so long as Suraja Doulah reigned in the palace of Herautjeel.

We reached the factory in safety, and there met a messenger carrying the expected letter from Colonel Clive to my patron; and thus duty and honour were in no way violated by the continuance of our flight. Guided and aided by an Usbeg Tartar, whom Mr. Watts had befriended some years before, we now performed an arduous journey by land and water, carefully eschewing the main road, upon which the Nabob's emissaries were likely to travel in search of us, and going over a good deal of unnecessary ground in order to keep clear of this dangerous path. And thus on to Culna, where to our great joy we met the English army; and oh, how pleasant a sight it was to us, newly escaped out of the jaws of the eastern lion, to look on the familiar uniforms, and shelter ourselves beneath the victorious flag of that dear free island in the West!

It was now the fourteenth of June. On the twelfth Colonel Clive and the troops that had been in quarters at Calcutta had set out for Chandernagore, where the remainder of the army had been left, with a hundred and fifty sailors from the fleet, and the next day continued their journey with the whole force, leaving one hundred stalwart Jack-tars as a garrison in the place. The Europeans, artillery, and stores made the journey up the noble Hooghly in boats, while the sepoys marched by the high-road.

In company with this gallant army we travelled pleasantly enough for two days, when we halted at Patlee, an insignificant town, whence Major Coote and a party sallied forth to the attack of the fort at Cutwah, a strong place garrisoned by a detachment of the Nabob's troops; and here, after a brief skirmish, Providence blessed our arms.

Mr. Watts and myself arrived at Cutwah soon after this vic-

torious attack, and encamped in the plain, where I encountered a surprise which for the time distracted my attention from public affairs and threw me back upon my own insignificant existence, with its many sorrows.

While the army were busy with the work of encamping, Mr. Watts was summoned to an interview with Colonel Clive, who was resting in his tent, with his papers spread out before him, and Major Coote seated by his side, giving him a lively account of the assault upon Cutwah fort. By this means released from attendance on my patron, I strolled among the troops white, and coloured, watching their busy preparations for the night's food and shelter. All were in excellent spirits, for it was a quality of Clive's mind to inspire life and hope in the minds of other men—yes, even of these sepoys, whose language he spoke so poorly, and who seemed to take from the very fire of his glance the spark that transformed them from the venal machines of war to daring and eager soldiers.

Night was fast closing in after the brief twilight of this eastern world, and I was walking somewhat listlessly among the newly-erected tents, when I was startled by the aspect of a face that flashed upon me across the glare of a watch-fire. It was the smoke-blackened countenance of a European soldier, who lay stretched at full length on the ground beside the fire, and it seemed wondrously familiar.

My heart leaped into my throat, and well-nigh choked me. Yes, it was a face that had been familiar to me in my old life—that old unforgotten time in which I had not yet bid good-bye to youth and hope. It was the face of the man with whom I had shared the slow agonies of the Black-Hole prison, whom I had believed dead of that night's torture.

"Phil!" I cried, with a ringing shout that startled the party by the watch-fire.

The English soldier leaped to his feet, sprang towards me, and embraced me as if I had been his sweetheart.

"Why, Robert, I thought thou wert dead!"

"And I had given you over for one of the hapless wretches buried in the ditch at Fort William on the 21st of June."

"No, Bob; I came forth out of that hell alive. By what instinct I saved myself I know not, for when I dropped from your neck I am sure I was dying. But I think the love of life is extra strong in vagabonds, like the love of drink or of women, or the thirst for an enemy's blood. I faintly remember clambering over the heaps of dead—yes, Bob, indifferent that I trod on corpses—to the mountain of corruption piled on the platform, and there I lay topmost and insensible. Some black Samaritan dragged me out, still half unconscious, and flung me on the grass outside, to die or recover as Fate would have it; and as Fate has constant need of such instruments of mischief as I am,



I did recover, escaping with only a touch of rheumatic fever and a scourge of boils, which latter affliction I endured with a most un-Job-like impatience. Recovered from these, I found myself a beggar amongst other beggars in Calcutta, where I must have starved but for the charity of that old Gentoo merchant with whom you statesmen are now so friendly. Here, however, I had the ill-luck to be the death of a Mussulman soldier by a chance blow in a drunken fight—for these Moors drink deep as John Bull himself, if they can but get the forbidden liquor—and was obliged to run for my life, and for two months led a wandering existence, bordering unpleasantly near upon starvation; for these Hindoos, who will do wonders of beneficence for any greasy, unclean wretch with a withered arm, or his finger-nails growing through the palms of his shrivelled hands, have little charity for a decent Englishman. I found more compassion at Chandernagore, where our enemies the French gave me food and shelter, and looked upon me as in a manner canonized by the martyrdom of the Black Hole; and here I lay until I heard that Clive and Watson were coming to the rescue, when I left my friendly foes, and contrived to join the English at Fulta."

"And you were at the capture of Calcutta?" I asked.

"Yes, Bob; and at Hooghly, in the night-attack on the Nabob's camp; and at the siege of Chandernagore. I have had my fill of fighting, and am a full sergeant, with a prospect of a pair of colours, should Fortune send us a successful issue to this noble rebellion."

"I wish you good-luck with all my heart, Phil," said I; and, having answered his eager questions as to my own adventures since last year, I linked my arm with his, and drew him away from the tents, for he held the key to a secret that was life or death to me.

"Do you remember what you told me in the Black Hole, Philip Hay?" I asked solemnly.

"Yes, Robert Ainsleigh," replied he, with mock gravity that ridiculed my earnestness; "and be sure what I told you *there* was the truth, for I felt the grip of Death's bony fingers on my wrist and that night, and whatever I said to you was a last dying speech and confession."

"You told me that Margery is your wife."

"As much as a marriage-service can make her so."

"And you sank unconscious at my feet while I was entreating you to tell me the name of the man who holds your marriage certificate."

"Likely enough, Bob. I have but a shadowy recollection of that night. The man's name is Blade—Silas Blade, an attorney in Little Britain. I lodged the certificate with him, in a tin box containing other papers, chiefly letters from my friend and patron Mr. Everard Lestrangle. Deuced cautious letters

they were too; but they tell their story nevertheless, and, knowing their value, I took care to put them in safe keeping. You see I always feared mischief from that gentleman; and, as he had shown himself anxious to get both the certificate and the letters from me, I should have been a very idiot to keep them in my own possession."

"Philip," said I, "you have often acknowledged you did me a cruel injury six years ago."

"Yes, Bob, I am ready enough to confess that sin."

"Will you go a step further than confession, and make some atonement for that injury?"

"What atonement can a penniless sergeant of Bengal Infantry offer to a lucky young fellow who has always fallen on his feet, and is now no doubt on the high-road to fortune?"

"If ever I go back to England, Phil, my first desire will be to annul that marriage with Margery. Had the poor child been true to herself, I would have gladly married her, as I told her father. Sure, I loved her as well as ever brother loved sister, and the memory of our happy childhood made her almost holy in my eyes; yet of that love which makes the glory and brightness of marriage there could, at best, have been none between us. But do you think I can peacefully endure the odious link that binds me to Everard Lestrangle's cast-off mistress? No, Philip, *that* tie could never be otherwise than hateful. Loosen it, and I will be a true friend to that poor deluded girl; loosen it, and I will say you did me no injury when you lent yourself to a plot that robbed me of Dorothea Hemsley."

"What can I do, Bob, more than I have done towards the loosening of your marriage-tie?"

"Give me your written statement of the facts, attested by Mr. Watts. Let me have a letter to your attorney, Mr. Bladé, authorizing him to give me that marriage certificate. You are going into action, and may fall—God forbid it should be so!—but I cannot afford to run any hazards, and must be prepared for the worst. If Meer Jaffier and his party succeed, I shall be handsomely rewarded for my humble service, and shall obtain leave to return to England. For pity's sake give me the power to set myself right there! Cancel the legal obligation that binds me to your wife, and I charge myself with her maintenance and protection from the hour of finding her."

"My wife!" cried Hay, with a careless laugh; "what a farce it all seems! My wife! and I know not whether the poor soul be alive or dead. A courtesan, perhaps, dancing at Vauxhall, with a face coated half an inch thick with white-lead, and patches of vermillion under her faded eyes!"

"No, by Heaven, I'll never believe that! Fallen, alas! poor child, but not impure; no grief would ever drive *her* to depravity."

"Thou'lt not believe! Alas, poor innocent! and what dost

*thou* know of the town's depravity? Have I not seen simplicity as rustic descend to the lowest hell of the dissolute? Woe be to that hand which pushes the frail creature on the first-step of sin's fatal slope! If you loved the girl with that brotherly affection you speak of, pray that you may find the rank weeds growing above her in some City graveyard. 'Tis your best chance of finding her no further advanced in vice than when you left her."

I was inexpressibly shocked by the cruel cynicism and settled conviction of my companion's tone, and yet I could not believe the bitterest fate could have driven Margery to vice. My trust in her better instincts was greater than my belief in Philip Hay's knowledge of the world. These men who study the worst side of mankind can believe anything easier than the possibility of virtue.

"Will you do what I want, Phil?" I asked presently. "You shall have a share of my good fortune if Colonel Clive dethrones the Nabob."

"Yes, Robert, I will do this thing for you, and without promise of payment. Though I'll not say that I shall refuse a ten-pound note should I fall in with you when your purse is full. There are Spartan virtues to which I never have pretended, and the rejection of a friendly loan is one of them. Take me where I can have pen, ink, and paper, and the deed shall be done."

After this I lost no time in conducting my companion to Mr. Watts's tent, from which my patron was happily absent. Here Philip Hay seated himself on the ground, and on a small travelling portfolio of my providing scrawled a declaration of his marriage with Margery Hawker, when and where performed, with Mr. Everard Lestrangle's name duly set down as witness of the ceremony.

This done, he wrote a letter to Mr. Blade, of Little Britain, authorizing that gentleman to permit the bearer to open a certain sealed case of papers, take from it the document he required, and reseal it with his own seal.

"I trust to your honour for taking nothing but the certificate, Bob," Mr. Hay said a little doubtfully, as he folded the letter.

"I am not quite a scoundrel, Phil."

"You are the simplest and best of men," he replied, with a laugh. "There is your letter."

"And here is Mr. Watts, who will oblige me by attesting your signature to the other paper."

My patron entered the tent as I spoke, and at once consented to witness the document without any knowledge of its contents.

"I hope you'll excuse my black face, sir," said Philip. "We had rather hot work at the fort to-day, and I had charge of a gun. How these black fellows sweat when they see us reload and fire charge number two before they have recovered from their surprise at charge number one! 'Tis as much as their best

gunners can do to fire a heavy piece once in a quarter of an hour, and they think there's witchcraft in British artillery."

With this vaunt of our English arms, Philip saluted Mr. Watts, shook me by the hand, and departed, after a whisper to the effect that we should meet elsewhere.

I was heartily glad to have seen him amongst the living, still more glad to hold the two papers he had given me.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PHILIP HAY MAKES ATONEMENT.

THE rainy season, which by a strange fatality had begun late in the previous year, when an early down-pour might have saved our wretched garrison at Fort William by the stoppage of the Nabob's troops and artillery, in this year of '57 happened to begin somewhat sooner than usual, and on the morning of the 19th of June a tempest of rain descended upon us with such violence as to drive us from under canvas into the town of Cutwah. Here we sought shelter in huts and houses, many of which had been abandoned during the siege, and in one of the more comfortable amongst them Mr. Watts and myself awaited the tide of events. I fully determined that in case of any fighting I would not sit idle under cover to hear English cannon roaring and English soldiers shouting in the distance. I had learnt to carry a gun in my first bitter year of slavery, and had enjoyed some experience of war with Mr. Holwell at Fort William.

It was on the evening after we abandoned our tents that Colonel Clive paid an unexpected visit to my patron, whom he found lying on a bamboo mat, enjoying the luxury of a repose he could never have tasted at Muxadavad, where the dagger of classic story had ever hung above his head. I rose to leave the apartment when the Colonel entered, but he bade me remain.

"It is idle ceremony to leave us," he said; "I know that Watts has confided in you throughout this business, and I presume you are to be trusted."

"To the death, sir."

"Faith, youngster, you and Mr. Watts have had a narrow squeak for your lives as it is," replied our dictator carelessly, and then turning with sudden gravity to my patron he entered upon public affairs.

"I don't like the look of things, Watts," he began, "and I am inclined to suspect Meer Jaffier will turn traitor. Do you know what he has done since you left Muxadavad?"

"No, indeed, Colonel."

"Why, it seems your flight threw the Nabob into such a tremor that instead of firing upon Meer Jaffier's palace, he sent for him post haste, fell upon his neck with maudlin affection, called him the lamp of wisdom, composer of the state, conqueror

of the universe, terror of the world, and I know not what else, after the manner of these Moorish mountebanks, and aided by apologizing with slavish humility for his false suspicions of his beloved servant, who owed every advancement to old Allaverdy, and to whose fidelity the dying Nabob had commended his adopted son."

"And how did Meer Jaffier escape from so awkward a situation?"

"Awkward, pshaw! These Moors think no situation awkward if lying will help them out of it. Meer Jaffier wept tears of joy upon his royal master's neck, abased himself to the ground to kiss his noble benefactor's foot, and ended by swearing on the Koran to give no help to the English in the contest, provided his beloved ruler allowed him to quit the province unmolested with his family and treasures."

"He has sworn this?"

"Yes, a native spy of mine was among the Nabob's retinue, and witnessed the touching scene. His messenger has just brought me a description of it."

"What revolting treachery!" cried Mr. Watts.

"Perhaps it was only diplomacy," Clive answered coolly; "for Meer Jaffier to reject a reconciliation would have been to show his cards too soon. He may mean us well yet; but we ought not to be in the dark as to his intentions. I have written to him every day since we left Chandernagore to inform him of our movements, but have had no letter from him since a somewhat ambiguous missive on the 19th. Can you find me a messenger to go at once to Muxadavad and ascertain the real state of the case? My fellow is dead beat with the journey, and I cannot send him back to the city without some loss of time. I want a man who can start immediately."

"Will you trust me with this commission, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"No, the safest messenger would be a native."

"I will go as a native. Mr. Watts will tell you I can speak their dialects, and disguise for a swarthy-visaged fellow like me will be easy enough. Pray trust me, sir."

"Nay, Robert," interposed my patron kindly; "you have once escaped out of the lion's den. Why be so eager to re-enter it?"

"I want to do something, sir, besides a clerk's work, though I am pleased to do that in your service."

"Egad, he reminds me of my own young days!" cried the Colonel good-humouredly. "I was always wanting to do something. I remember at Pondicherry, in '48, how, in my haste to get ammunition, I left the battery where I was posted, and ran to fetch it myself, instead of sending a sergeant for it. One good-natured gentleman said it was fear and not zeal made me run so fast. His words reached my ears, and I challenged him, but on our way to the ground the scoundrel struck me. I drew

my sword on the spot, and should have fought him there and then, but a crowd of fellows separated us. He was made afterwards to ask my pardon in front of the battalion; but as the court that made him apologize took no notice of the blow, I demanded satisfaction a second time from the slanderer. This he refused; so I waved my cane above his head before our men, and told him he was too paltry a scoundrel for the honour of a drubbing. *That* seemed to have penetrated; for he resigned his commission next day. But this is gossip, and not business."

There was some further discussion, in which my arguments well-nigh prevailed; but finding the Colonel still inclined to doubt me, I watched my opportunity, and presently took advantage of a change in the conversation to slip out of the room, borrow a turban, shirt, and loose trousers from one of our bearers, colour my face and hands with a mixture of turmeric and grease, and thus transformed, went back to the room where the Colonel and Mr. Watts were still conversing, after an interval of little more than a quarter of an hour.

I approached my patron with the usual reverence, and gave him an imaginary message in my best Bengalee, requesting him to go to one of our men, who was seized with sudden illness.

Mr. Watts rose in hasty compliance with this demand upon his charity, and brushed past me on his way to the door.

I burst out laughing.

"Come, Colonel Clive," I cried, "you may fairly trust me on your errand since my master does not know me."

This turned the scale, and in half an hour I was in a little boat, with a couple of native rowers, on my way to Muxadavad. The rain fell in torrents, but I was sheltered under a pitched awning, and travelled luxuriously in comparison with my wretched transit upon this same river nearly a year ago. Before leaving my quarters I had taken care to deposit Philip Hay's two papers in the safe keeping of my patron.

We reached the city without loss of time, and after loitering in the streets long enough to pick up what news I could, I entered the palace of the commander-in-chief without being asked any questions but such as I could easily answer. I sent our ally a message couched in language so figurative that only he could understand it, and after some little delay was conducted to an inner court, where I found Meer Jaffier alone with his son Meeran, as on the day we witnessed his signature to the treaty. He received me with a somewhat alarming reserve of manner, and had but just begun to question me, when a man whom I knew to be in the confidence of Suraja Doulah was ushered into the apartment with his train of attendants, and received with much polite self-abasement by Jaffier and his son.

This magnate of the court had but just entered when Meeran turned upon me with sudden fury, threatening to cut off my

head for a spy, and swearing to annihilate every Englishman in Olive's army should they dare cross the river into the island. His rage, though happily unreal, was so well simulated as to be alarming, and I was glad when I found myself outside the palace; but I had scarce got clear of the gates when a kitmutgar overtook me, and bade me hang about the neighbourhood until he should bring me a letter. This order I faithfully obeyed, and lay in a little niche at a corner of the Moorish palace, only partially sheltered from the ceaseless rain, until dark, when the same man who had given me the message brought me a letter, and bade me hasten back with it to Colonel Clive; whereupon I returned to my faithful rowers, and, the rain now happily abating, had a swift and pleasant journey back to Cutwah.

At Muxadavad I had heard how the Nabob's troops, not foreseeing any chance of plunder in an encounter on the open plain, had set up a sudden claim for their arrears of pay, and refused to stir without a handsome payment on account; whereby the city had been in a state of riot for the last three days. This I thought was excellent news for our party.

I arrived at Cutwah at an eventful moment. The aspect of affairs was considered most unpromising, and Colonel Clive himself, in his onerous double capacity of general and statesman, was obviously disheartened. He had received several letters from Meer Jaffier during my absence; but although these promised fidelity, and appeared to be written in good faith, they gave no definite pledge of co-operation, and the Colonel now began to fear that in the impending struggle the English must stand alone: a sorry prospect, seeing that we were without horse, and had but three thousand men against Suraja Doulah's fifty or, possibly, eighty thousand. In this dilemma the Colonel had written to the Rajah of Burdwan, notoriously disaffected towards the Nabob, entreating him to join us with his cavalry, were they but a thousand. Vain hope! when was an Indian leader known to range himself upon the weaker side? A council of war had just been held, and the decisive question mooted: "Should the army cross the river at once, and at all risks attack the Nabob; or should they avail themselves of the large stores of rice found at Cutwah to maintain themselves during the rainy season, and in the meantime invite the Morattoes to enter the province and join them?" Ballajerow's offer was now known to be genuine. He had a hundred and twenty thousand men ready to join the English standard. Surely it must be a mad folly to attack Suraja Doulah's great army with a handful of troops, while this gigantic force lay in the mountains awaiting our summons.

Clive was himself the first to vote, and his voice was on the side of caution. The very fact of his voting first was against all martial etiquette, by which the youngest officer present

should first have given his opinion. It may be supposed that, by his deviation from rule, the Colonel desired to weigh down the scale on the side of prudence.

I found him alone in a grove of trees near his quarters, lying on the ground in deep meditation. He started to his feet, surprised by my coming.

"I was made for a soldier and not a statesman," he cried to himself rather than to me; and with an impatient stamp of his foot. "Good God, how it went against my grain to give that opinion just now! and yet I feel that common prudence demands as much. The game is too desperate. Those black devils would be twenty to one against us. I am sure of my own men; but the Bengalese are poor creatures. 'Tis like throwing a handful into an ocean. And if Suraja Doulah's men should fight—as we know they *can* fight, and have fought under Allaverdy—Yes, common prudence urges me against so rash a folly. Common prudence! d—n common prudence! she is a jade that never yet led the way to glory. And Coote voted for an immediate attack. By G—, we'll cross the river!"

He was not a handsome man; but as he looked up at this moment, with his hand upon his sword-hilt, he seemed inspired. I thought I had never seen a finer countenance.

"Coote," he muttered, "and so you want to out-hero me, do you, major? We'll cross the river, *coûte qui coûte*."

He turned upon me sharply. "What do you want?" he asked in the vilest Bengalee.

I smiled as I delivered my letter.

"From Meer Jaffier, sir."

"Why, confound your impudence, sir!" cried the Colonel, as he snatched the packet from my hand with more than his usual impetuosity; "this is the second time you have deceived me. I took you for a beggarly native; and here have you been listening to my rhapsodizing."

"It is an honour to have overheard a hero communing alone with the goddess Fortune, sir," I replied, with a smile.

"Nay, sirrah, you have surprised the reflections of a gamester tempted to stake his all upon a cast. Great heavens, young man, have you any notion of the stake we play for? Upon my soul I doubt it, or you would scarce stand grinning there as if you but watched a game of piquet. If we cross the river to be beaten, the English cause is lost in Bengal, be sure of that. The French, who hate us by nature—yes, sir, they are created with a hatred of Englishmen as surely as with a taste for frogs—have now a political justification for doing us all the evil they can. Is it likely they will forgive Chander-nagore? To the French the Nabob inclines, for they have never beaten him. On them he hangs for help, believing them stronger than they are. Bussy has but to march from the Circars to



join the tyrant, and we are most inevitably lost. And to lose Bengal is to lose all of India that is of any real value to us. Bombay and the west coast scarce pay their expenses, and our possessions on the coast of Coromandel are a burden; for instead of profit they show a debt of nearly half a million. To fight is to tempt Fate. It is desperate, mad, wicked; for our stake is not only that which we hold at present. We hazard a hundred times more than our paltry certainties of to-day, sir; we hazard our glorious chances of the future. Yes, to fight is madness."

He tore open the letter and handed it to me. "Translate me that, sir, you who are learned in tongues."

I read the missive—an assurance of fidelity, and a promise that, if possible, the troops of Meer Jaffier should come over to us on the field of battle.

"Yes," cried Clive, with supreme contempt, "they will come over to our side when the day is ours. I know these people. If you want to distinguish yourself as a volunteer, Mr. Ainsleigh, you had better make all haste to wash your face and put on Christian raiment. We may be marching in an hour."

I made the Colonel a military salute, and ran off to obey him. What a fever of the blood, what a pleasant quickening of the pulse, I felt as I hurried to my patron's tent! Robert Ainsleigh, with all his sorrowful memories and bitter sense of loss, melted into air. My individuality was gone; I was a part of England's glory, to triumph or to fall with the fortunes of the day. Hurried and eager as I was, I had no time to wonder at my own high spirits, and to cry aloud in astonishment, "And this is war! Thrice-divine Mars, bethou henceforward my god!"

Mr. Watts was delighted to see me return in safety; and with that kind patron I shared a comfortable repast before preparing for the threatened march. Having but one suit of clothes with me, and that a civilian's, I borrowed a shabby militia uniform from the captain of the Calcutta corps, and thus attired felt myself a hero.

The trumpet-call roused us before sunrise, and in the first glory of daylight our English host began to cross the river. We started in excellent spirits, leaving the sick and wounded, and a few civilians, Mr. Watts among them, at Cutwah. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the passage of the troops was completed. We had crossed our Rubicon, the gauntlet of rebellion was flung down, and who could tell which among us would live to repass that fatal tide?

The afternoon brought a new messenger with another letter from Meer Jaffier, a native who had left Mauxadavad on the same day as myself, but had taken bye-roads and otherwise at times, with the unheroic caution common to these people. I was again hastily called upon as interpreter between the

Colonel and his confederate. The letter informed us that Suraja Doulah had halted at a village some six miles south of Cassimbazar, where he intended to intrench and wait the event. Here Jaffier suggested that the English should surprise him by marching round by the inland part of the island.

Clive listened to this letter with a lowering brow, and then turning to me, cried in his angriest voice,—

“Bid this fellow tell his master that I shall march to Plassey without an hour’s delay. To-morrow morning will bring us to the village of Daoodpore, and if Meer Jaffier does not join us there, by the beard of his Prophet, or, what is better, an Englishman’s word of honour, I will make peace with Suraja Doulah, and so end this vacillating scoundrel’s chances of the musnud!”

As may be supposed, I took care to modify the language of this message, but made it sufficiently firm to convey the Colonel’s full meaning.

Before sunset we were again on the march, but could make head but slowly, having to wait for the boats, which were towed against the stream, and thus we pursued a most difficult and toilsome journey, advancing fifteen miles in eight hours, and at an hour past midnight arrived at Plassey.

Here we took possession of a mango-grove, and had but just time to look about us, when those near the Colonel, myself among them, were startled by a faint sound of discordant music in the distance.

“By G—,” cried Clive, “they are close upon us!”

We kept silence, listening intently to that distant music. It continued, now fainter, now louder, the shrill cry of clarions, the clash of cymbals, the incessant beating of drums—to all of us a most familiar and significant sound, for it had accompanied the night-watches of the Nabob’s army when they lay encamped by the Morattoo ditch at Calcutta.

“Yes,” exclaimed the Colonel, after we had stood for some time in silence, “they are here before us.”

He said no more, but hastened to give rapid orders for the placing of guards and sentinels. There was a sudden hurrying to and fro, but neither noise nor confusion; and the watch being set, the rest of the troops were bidden to snatch what slumber they could. For the officers and their commander there was of course no sleep on that eventful night.

The grove of Plassey has now become so famous that I need not describe it minutely. It is a space of some eight hundred yards in length and three hundred in breadth, planted with straight rows of mango-trees, and enclosed by a mound, and a ditch choked with weeds and brambles. A little way from the grove, on the river-bank, there is a hunting-lodge of Suraja Doulah’s, surrounded by a garden wall. About a mile from

this house the river describes a curve like a horseshoe; and it was at this point the enemy lay, behind an intrenchment that had been thrown up by Roydonlub some months before for the protection of this camp.

At daybreak we saw the enemy advancing towards the mango-grove where we lay, 50,000 foot, 18,000 horse, and 50 pieces of cannon of the largest calibre, 24- and 32-pounders. Every gun was mounted on a monstrous wooden platform, six feet from the ground, carrying both ammunition and gunners, and drawn by forty or fifty yoke of huge white oxen, while behind each of these monstrous moving stages walked an elephant, trained to push the machine forward with his forehead whenever the ground was unusually heavy. It is impossible to imagine anything more imposing than this barbarous machine, with its train of white oxen; and I could fancy myself watching some savage Carthaginian host in the heroic centuries before Christ, rather than a modern army.

The tyrant's foot-soldiers were armed with every kind of weapon, matchlocks, pikes, swords, arrows, rockets. The cavalry were stout fellows from Northern India, mounted on powerful horses. These and the foot-soldiers advanced in separate and compact bodies, and presently fell into position with a regularity and spirit we had scarcely expected of them.

It was my privilege to be in attendance upon Colonel Clive as he stood on the roof of the Nabob's hunting-house surveying this formidable host. He had kept me near his person since I brought him Meer Jaffier's letter, in order that I might be ready to serve him as interpreter at any moment.

"Egad," he cried, "I did not think they were so strong! That is a splendid sight, is it not, Mr. Ainsleigh?"

"Splendid indeed, sir. I could fancy myself looking over the sands of Marathon; nor can I believe that the Persians mustered much stronger than these, in spite of Herodotus and his big numbers.

"Herodotus was a Greek—and a liar, Mr. Ainsleigh. He sprang from the same root as these scoundrels, and we know how these give the reins to their fancy. Why, instead of forty-five millions sterling in the treasury at Muxadavad, I find it is a question if there are four. See," he cried, looking through his glass, "there are Meer Jaffier's troops."

"Will they join us, do you think, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Ainsleigh, when the day is ours."

The issue of events proved this a true prophecy. And now began the business of the day. At eight o'clock a shot from the enemy killed one of our men and gave the signal of battle. Glorious, yet on our side almost bloodless, was the struggle that followed. After a brief skirmish in the open—which cost us too many, though it cost our foe ten of his men to one of

ours—the Colonel ordered us back to the grove. Here our little band seated themselves on the ground, and suffered the despot's artillery to waste its fury upon the tops of the mangotrees, while our own gunners answered the enemy's cannon from behind the bank.

At eleven o'clock Clive held a brief council at the drum-head, when it was resolved to maintain the cannonade all day, and sally forth upon the Nabob's camp at midnight.

At noon Providence sent us a sudden storm of rain, which, as we afterwards ascertained, did much damage to the enemy's powder. Their fire now abated; and two hours later we were astounded beyond measure to perceive the trains of oxen re-yoked, and the whole army retiring slowly towards the camp.

One Sinfray, a French officer, with some forty vagabond fellows of the same nation, retained their station upon a large mound of earth surrounding a tank. This was a most favourable position from whence to assail our retreating foe, and Major Kilpatrick, tempted by the opportunity, advanced from the grove to attack it, with two companies of the battalion and two field-pieces. Before starting he sent a messenger to announce his intention to Colonel Clive, who was found asleep in the hunting-house, and started up with much anger on hearing the Major's message.

He ran to the detachment, reproved Kilpatrick in no measured terms, and sent him back to the grove to fetch the rest of the army. Having thus relieved himself he took the lead of the detachment and proceeded to attack Monsieur Sinfray, who speedily abandoned his ground before so formidable an assailant. And now for the first time we perceived a large body of troops hovering on our right, and these were afterwards discovered to belong to Meer Jaffier, but as they made no signal, they were saluted at intervals by a sharp fire from our men, which kept them at a respectful distance.

The hottest part of the action now took place between ourselves and Sinfray's forty Frenchmen, while the Nabob's matchlock men powdered upon us from an angle of his camp. The gunners at the same time tried to bring out their cannon, but our field-pieces played so warmly and so well upon them as always to drive them back.

The enemy's horse also suffered considerably at this juncture, and among them fell four or five officers of the highest rank. Their loss flung our foes into obvious disorder; and Clive, taking swift advantage of this, gave orders to storm the angle of the camp, as well as an eminence to which Sinfray and his men, with a number of blacks, had withdrawn after being routed from the tank, and whence they had kept up a galling fire upon us. I was among the party that assaulted this post, and was happily able to hold my own in a hand-to-hand skirmish with a

couple of Frenchmen, whom I had the satisfaction of tumbling down the slippery slope on which we wrestled. It was a regular *mêlée*, and as I rolled down the incline grappling hand and foot with these two rascals, I heard Philip Hay on the height above me roaring out, "King George and victory!" and "D—n to all blacks and frog-eating mounseers!" I kicked myself loose from my Frenchmen, and scrambled up the embankment, eager to join my friend; but while the triumphant shout was still on his lips, I heard it change to a shrill scream of pain, as he cried, "Hit, by G—d!"

I was with him in the next moment, holding him in my arms.

"What is it, Phil?"

"My quietus, Bob. No mistake about it this time. So, you see, after all, a rogue may escape Tyburn. Can you lay me down in some corner where I may die quietly? No, lad, there's no hope. I feel myself bleeding inwardly."

All this was said in laboured whispers, and his ghastly countenance told me but too truly that he was right.

The day was ours: the foe flying right and left of us; the mighty armament of our eastern Nero retreating with a noise as of thunder, the tyrant mounted on the swiftest of his camels, foremost among the flying. Yes, we had beaten them. Mr. Orme protests Suraja Doulah had eighty thousand soldiers on that fateful field, while Colonel Clive computes them but at fifty thousand. I have adopted the higher figure, but at the lowest our enemies were near fifty to one against us. And they fled, leaving elephants, oxen, forty pieces of cannon, machines, carriages, and baggage of all kinds. It is impossible to imagine a rout more ignominious, a victory more complete.

A couple of soldiers aided me to carry Philip Hay back to the famous mango-grove, now deserted, except by a few bearers and other black servants in charge of our baggage. Clive and the entire army had started in pursuit of the fugitives, and only the disabled remained behind. Sinfray, the French captain, had been wounded and taken prisoner, after a desperate fight, and carried off to one of the tents, where he was attended to by an English surgeon, in common with some of our own wounded.

Philip Hay's strength being but too evidently fast ebbing, we did not wait to reach the tent, but laid him on a bamboo mat under the trees, and here I sat down beside him, while the surgeon was fetched. His hand lay in mine, dead cold, and his clouding eyes looked up at me with an affection that touched me to the heart.

"I swear, Bob, thou art the only creature I ever loved: except my mother—except my mother."

He repeated these words with infinite tenderness, and then lay silent for some moments, staring absently at his fingers as they wandered about the lapels of his coat.

"Yes, Bob, I loved my mother," he murmured presently, "though you would scarce believe as much, seeing I have never spoken of her tenderly until this day. She was a poor weak soul. Alas, how often have I called her a fool! But she loved me, and was proud of my scholarship, though she was but a farmer's daughter who knew not Latin from Greek, and was sorely put to it to spell plain English. God bless her! I have a foolish sentimental wish that I could lie by her side under the willows in East Walcott churchyard, instead of by this India river. Thou wilt see they bury me like a Christian, Bob; and if there is anything thou canst claim for me in the way of prize-money, thou'lt send it to my sisters at East Walcott, in Warwickshire. I have sent them a share of most bits of luck that have fallen to me in a life of ups and downs. You see the veriest scoundrel has one soft corner in his heart where he keeps the memories of his childhood, and the images of those who loved him when he was young and guileless."

"Dear friend, I will get all I can for your sisters, and see it safe in their hands."

"Dear friend! God bless thine innocence, Robert Ainsleigh! Dear traitor would be nearer the mark. But Joseph forgave his brothers. Confess now that my treachery made thy fortune. Oh, Bob, 'tis hard to die like this! I was first to mount the bank, and to-day's work would have won me a pair of colours. Egad, how I should have enjoyed plundering the enemy's baggage! You can take all the papers in the tin case; and if you can use those letters against Lestrangle, do so."

"Oh, Phil, you should die in charity with all men!"

"With all men, yes; but he's a devil. Would you have me die in charity with the devil? Here comes the surgeon. Don't let him put me to any torture, Bob, as you love me. It would be wasted pain."

The medical officer knelt down and began his examination with much tenderness.

"No," he said, in answer to Philip's appeal; "I'll not put you to any pain."

He seated himself beside the patient with his hand upon the wrist of the left arm, which now lay listless across the dying man's breast, while his right hand was held in mine. A look from the surgeon told me that all was over.

"A soldier's death," muttered Philip—"in the hour of victory. God's mercy wipe out my catalogue of sins! Better than Tyburn. Tell—my sisters—died like a soldier—faithful service—of his country."

And so was severed the one frail link that bound me to my past life.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## TREACHERY RECOILS ON THE TRAITOR.

I stood by Philip Hay's grave at midnight on the 23rd-24th of June, the night after the most important victory which English arms have yet achieved in Hindostan. Short is the interval between death and burial in the summer solstice, and my poor companion's funeral rites were a little more hurried than they would have been had he died a natural death in time of peace. We buried him under the mango-trees, in that grove which has now an almost classic renown; and in default of a parson my own lips read the funeral service above his grave. This done, and a few silent tears shed for a companion whose conduct towards me had been such a strange mixture of affection and faithlessness, I went back to the business of life, which was at this crisis a most feverish excitement.

The army had gone on to Daoodpore.

At daybreak Mr. Watts and Mr. Scrafton arrived from Cutwah, and roused me from a troubled slumber.

"Dress yourself in your civilian's costume without loss of a minute," cried my patron. "I have just received a message from the Colonel, bidding me wait immediately upon Meer Jaffier, to conduct him to Daoodpore. Scrafton is to go with me, and you had better come too."

I obeyed this summons with delighted eagerness, for I knew that my attendance upon Mr. Watts would most likely introduce me to the side-scenes of the theatre in which this stirring drama of British conquest was being enacted. We went at once to the tent of Meer Jaffier, whose haggard and careworn face denoted a night spent in anxious thought rather than in slumber. He received us with a singular air of reserve; and if we had been doomsmen sent to conduct him to the scaffold, instead of the emissaries of a victorious ally, he could scarcely have betrayed more apprehension. The fact was, that, fully conscious of his own cowardly vacillation up to the very hour of victory, he dreaded some retribution at our hands now that we had raised ourselves to power.

We conducted him with all pomp to the English camp at Daoodpore, accompanied by his son Meeran, and mounted on his elephant. At the entrance to the camp he alighted from this stately charger, when the guards drew out and saluted him with grounded arms. This compliment the craven evidently took for a movement of threatening import; for he started back, and only recovered himself when Clive ran forward and embraced him, saluting him Nabob of Bengal, Behar, and Orixa.

This meeting was followed by a private conference in the Colonel's tent; after which Meer Jaffier returned to his troops,

and hastened with them to Muxadavad, to prevent the escape of Suraja Doulah, or the plunder of the royal treasuries, which the fallen tyrant, knowing matters to be desperate, would doubtless endeavour to empty of all portable wealth.

Colonel Clive did not advance his troops immediately to Muxadavad, eager though they were to enter the royal city. The army marched in the afternoon of the 24th, and halted in the night at a place called Sydabad, about six miles from Daoodpore; while Mr. Watts and myself went on with our attendants to the capital, where we were charged with the delicate duty of inquiring into the state of the treasury, and keeping our eyes generally open to the aspect of current affairs in the interests of our honourable masters.

We arrived shortly after midnight, and found the city in extreme confusion. On going at once to Meer Jaffier's palace, we heard that Suraja Doulah had fled just two hours before, under circumstances as ignominious as those that attended the flight of that parallel monster who fled from imperial Rome before the prætorian guards of Galba.

Disguised in a menial's dress, and attended only by a couple of venal favourites, male and female, the late sovereign of Bengal, Behar, and Orixia had let himself out of a window, and stolen secretly away, carrying a casket of jewels in his bosom. He did not thus abandon himself to the ignominy without some waverings. A midnight council had been held after the battle, and the Lamp of Riches had sought the advice of his servants. Some had bid him throw himself upon the honour of the English; but these he set down as traitors. Others urged that he should encourage the army by great rewards, and appear again at their head in the morning. This he seemed to approve, and ordered an instant distribution of three months' pay to the troops; but the craven wretch had no sooner returned to his seraglio than panic again seized him, and at daybreak next morning he sent away his women, and fifty elephants laden with their furniture and necessaries, and a considerable portion of his jewels. There is little doubt that he had ere this resolved upon flight, and waited only for nightfall to cover his departure.

The tidings of Meer Jaffier's arrival in the city struck the last blow to this dastard spirit, and at ten o'clock the grandson and grandnephew of that dauntless soldier Allaverdy had crept in secret from the capital where his predecessor had reigned so prosperously.

Next morning beheld the city in supreme confusion. The hapless Lamp of Riches was not permitted to depart to safety. Meer Jaffier, who owed his advancement in life to the favour of Allaverdy, was quick to despatch the pursuers on the track of his dead benefactor's adopted son. Mohun Lall and other low favourites of the fallen despot were seized at noon while trying



to escape from the city, where their profligate pleasures and undeserved exaltation had been so vile a scandal. The women and the elephants were stopped next day, some fifteen miles from the capital.

On the 25th, Colonel Clive entered Muxadavad, attended by a hundred sepoys, and paid a state visit to Meer Jaffier, on which Mr. Watts and I had the honour to accompany him. The inhabitants of the city, who until now had been doubtful to whom they should look as their ruler, perceived by this visit in which quarter the wind lay; and Meer Jaffier, supported by his British allies, now ventured to proclaim himself Nabob. Early next day was held a solemn conference between Meer Jaffier, Roydoulub, and Mr. Watts, attended by me, at the house of those great Gentoo bankers, the Seits. And now was revealed to us the somewhat unpleasant fact that the entire contents of the Nabob's treasury would not suffice for the performance of those splendid promises which we had obtained from our Mahometan ally. The restitution of confiscated fortunes at Calcutta, with the donations to the squadron, army, and committee, amounted to near three millions sterling; a heavy demand upon even a princely treasury.

A period of doubt and some apprehension followed this discovery, and next day a rumour reached us that a midnight council had been held between Roydoulub, Meer Jaffier's son Meeran, and an officer of distinction, in which it had been proposed to assassinate our colonel. Whether this dark report was true or false I dare not say; but as it was in no manner inconsistent with the Oriental character, I rode off at once to Mandipoor, where the army had halted on the 25th, and went straight to the commander's tent, where I related the story.

Clive heard me with a smile of contempt.

"Upon my soul, Mr. Ainsleigh, I believe these fellows capable of anything. Now that our arms have won Meer Jaffier a throne, I have no doubt he is inclined to grumble at the price he has to pay for it, and would perhaps consider a bullet through my brain the shortest way to cancel his debt to us. You did wisely in bringing me this news. I was to have entered the city to-morrow, but will now defer my visit for a little, in order to discover whether there is any plot hatching against me. That youth Meeran has a brutal truculent countenance that indicates a natural bent for murder."

The next day brought us no further hint of the plot, though we had our spies on the watch for any indication of danger; and on the morning of the 29th our English hero entered the city with an escort five hundred strong, and rode at once to the palace that had been prepared for him, which, with its gardens, was spacious enough to accommodate all the troops.

Here came Meeran to visit and welcome our conqueror, and

Immediately conducted him to Suraja Doulah's palace, where Meer Jaffier awaited his ally, surrounded by his officers of state, and with all imaginable pomp and splendour. To assist at such a scene seemed to me like a dream of the "Arabian Nights," rather than one of life's realities; and as I stood amongst the little knot of civilians, at a respectful distance from the hero of the day, I could scarce convince myself that I was awake.

The musnud, or throne, was fixed in the hall of audience, and this seat of power Meer Jaffier avoided with somewhat demonstrative humility until Colonel Clive, perceiving this, conducted him to the spot where it stood, and in a manner installed him in his royal office. This done, he beckoned to me, and bade me speak to the great men in Persian, bidding them rejoice in the downfall of so black a tyrant as Suraja Doulah, and the elevation of so good a prince in his stead. So here stood I, Robert Ainsleigh, the wail and castaway of cruel Fortune, by the side of a throne, interpreting the desires of this modern king-maker, Robert Clive; and I could but think, as this great English soldier installed the Moorish usurper on the throne our arms had won, it would have been as easy for him to have seated himself there, a new Tamerlane, conqueror and ruler of this Paradise of nations, Bengal,—a wealthy centre from which he might have extended his power wide as the dominions of Aurungzebe.

Sure I am that no such ambitious thought ever flashed across the brain of Robert Clive. From first to last he was a faithful servant of those obscure English traders whom he called his honourable masters. The time came when he told *them* that the hour had arrived in which they might sweep away the shadowy royalties that were supported only by their arms, and reign by themselves alone; but of personal aggrandizement, or the brilliant possibilities of an independent career as ruler of those native forces he so well could wield, I am convinced he never thought. As an apostate to Leadenhall Street, he might have been the Cæsar of this eastern world; as a faithful servant, he was the object of malignity and suspicion to the end of his days.

On the day after this installation of Meer Jaffier another meeting was held at the house of the Seits. Colonel Clive, Jaffier, Meeran, Roydoulub, Mr. Watts, Mr. Scrafton, and myself were all present; and with us came Omichund, who had hastened back to the city on hearing of our success, and who hung with fawning affection upon the steps of the Colonel, in whose favour the fond, deluded wretch believed himself firmly established. Arrived at the banker's house, however, he found himself excluded from the carpet where Clive and the rest sat in conference, and perforce withdrew to a distant seat, whence I saw him watch us with eager eyes throughout the council. All

went smoothly. The treaties, in English and Persian, were read; and after some little discussion it was agreed that one-half of the money-stipulations should be paid immediately,—two-thirds of this half in coin, and the remaining third in jewels, plate, and effects, at a valuation,—and that the other half should be discharged in three annual instalments.

This concluded, there remained nothing to do but to undeceive Omichund, whose looks I had observed to grow more restless and eager as the conference proceeded, and whom, despite his falsehood, I could not but pity. Colonel Clive was the first to refer to this matter.

"Oh, by the bye, Mr. Ainsleigh," he said, looking suddenly up at me as I stood behind my patron's seat, "there's Omichund waiting yonder. Doubtless the poor wretch is eager to know his fate. You had best tell him the truth."

"Oh, sir," I exclaimed, "there is no task I would not sooner perform."

"What, are you so squeamish as that? I thought you had better sense than to compassionate such a scoundrel.—Here, Scrafton, you can tell him."

Mr. Scrafton bowed, and rose to do the Colonel's bidding, but with no willing air. It was indeed a task which no man could perform without repugnance, however convinced of its necessity. He crossed the spacious chamber, we all following, towards the spot where Omichund was now standing, in an attitude of profoundest humility, yet with eager expectancy gleaming in his sharp black eyes. Alas, poor wretch! he fancied we were coming to congratulate him on the wealth which the treaty assured him.

I am fain to confess that Mr. Scrafton fulfilled his mission somewhat awkwardly. For a few moments he stood silent, looking at the old Gentoo, and but too evidently embarrassed by his obnoxious task. Then with a clumsy abruptness he stammered out, in Hindoostanee,—

"Omichund, the red paper is a trick. You are to have nothing."

Never shall I forget the awful effect of these words. For some moments the Gentoo stood transfixed, regarding us with a questioning stare, as if he sought to discover whether this abrupt announcement might not be some foolish joke, planned for the amusement of the English. Then, suddenly convinced by the seriousness of our countenances, he flung his arms above his head with a sharp cry as of mortal agony, and fell back senseless into the arms of his attendants.

"May I go with him to his house, sir?" I asked of Mr. Watts, as they carried this martyr of disappointed avarice away to his palanquin.

My patron nodded assent, and I hastened to accompany the dismal procession, for on my poor Tara's account I was anxious

to discover how the old man would bear this bitter blow. He was taken to a luxurious chamber, shaded from the noontide heat, and cooled by blinds which were kept constantly watered. Here he was laid upon a pile of cushions, beside which I sat for several hours; but he remained in a kind of stupor during all that time, and when I left him there were yet no signs of improvement in his state.

Juggernaut Sing, the husband of my Gentoo maid, came to look upon his lord, and, standing by the prostrate figure, pronounced a bitter invective against the English traitors who had thus abused his confidence. I made no attempt to dispute with this wretch, with whom hatred of the English was a sort of monomania, but quietly departed, convinced that I could have no chance of seeing Tara while her tyrant husband was in the way.

It was two days later than this that the tidings of Suraja Doulah's capture reached Muxadavad. The rowers of his boat, failing from fatigue, stopped in the night at Raj Mahal, where the wretched fugitive and his female companion had taken shelter in a deserted garden. Here he was discovered at day-break by a man whom he had ill-treated at this very place more than a year ago, and who ran at once to Meer Jaffier's brother, a resident in the place, to betray his fallen persecutor. The cry of pursuit was instantly raised, the soldiers rushed to seize their victim, and hurried him back to the capital, beguiling the tedium of the journey by the infliction of all imaginable insult and indignity upon their helpless charge. The unlucky wretch survived even this last ignominy, and was brought at midnight to the palace, where he had so lately played the despot, bound like a common felon, and trembling before the usurper.

I was told that Meer Jaffier seemed somewhat touched by this pitiable sight; and indeed it would have been hard for humanity to behold unmoved a creature so fallen. Suraja Doulah humiliated himself to the dust before his enemy's feet, imploring for life, and life alone; and I think this scene can scarce fail to recall a picture in our own history, when Monmouth, a youth of about the age of this Indian prince, sued to his uncle, James the Second, for the bare privilege of existence. Both James and Meer Jaffier refused the boon that might so safely have been granted; both lived to forfeit the power which their inclement natures had abused.

Whether the usurper was really moved by his helpless kinsman's humiliation, it is hard to say, so skilled in hypocrisy are these people. If he were inclined to melt, there was one at hand who knew not mercy,—Meeran, a youth of seventeen, who urged the instant slaughter of the fallen despot. Meer Jaffier, apparently reluctant to adopt so severe a course, dismissed his late master to a convenient dungeon, and retired to take counsel of his officers. Some, with a touch of humanity, argued against

the murder of so mean a foe, and advised that the late Nabob should be allowed to end his days in the peaceful solitude of a prison; others, more anxious to flatter their new lord than to obey the dictates of compassion, agreed with Meeran that there could be no safety for the state while this wretch breathed. Jaffier wavered between these two opinions, but expressed none himself, too cautious to betray a wish that he would fain see realized without his bidding.

Meeran in this critical situation read his father's mind aright, and with tender solicitude urged him to retire to rest, assured that he, Meeran, would take care of the prisoner. To this Jaffier assented, pretending to be relieved by an assurance conveyed in words of such doubtful meaning. He had no sooner departed than the word was given for slaughter. A gang of ruffians burst into the dungeon where Suraja Doulah tremblingly awaited his doom. In an agony of terror he grovelled at the feet of his doomsmen, imploring a brief respite, only sufficient time to say his prayers, to perform his pious ablutions; but a jar of water happening to stand near, one of the assassins flung it rudely over the victim, and thus gave the death-signal to his colleagues, who instantly set upon their unresisting quarry and hacked him piecemeal.

His mangled remains were paraded through the city next morning upon an elephant. I chanced to meet the dread procession, and never did these eyes look upon a more odious spectacle. It struck terror even to the hearts of an Oriental populace, accustomed as they are to horrors, and an awful silence reigned that day throughout the city of Muxadavad.

Thus violently was extinguished the Lamp of Riches, after having illuminated this world for just twenty years. It was but a brief life in which to illustrate all the vices of man; but I think Allaverdy's favourite had left few species of wickedness unexemplified in his short career.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### I MAKE A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

AMONGST those who entered Muxadavad with the English troops was our prisoner of war, the French captain, Sinfray, whose wounds proved to be very slight, and who was lodged in a large building near the river used as an hospital for our own sick. Here he was detained a prisoner until Colonel Clive and his counsellors should decide what to do with him. He had small claim upon our kindness except the common claim of a brave soldier, for he and his little band had given us nearly as much trouble as all the rest of the late Nabob's army.

We heard about this time that Mr. Law, with a party of Frenchmen, had advanced from Boglipore in response to Suraja

Doulah's summons, but had been stopped on their way by a vague report of our victory at Plassey. Had they pushed on despite the ill news, they might have met and saved Snrāja Doulah; but while they lingered irresolute, arrived the tidings of the tyrant's capture, on which they marched back to Behar, there to ally themselves with Ramnarain, Vice-Nabob of the province, a Gentoo, and a notorious enemy of Meer Jaffier. Such an alliance, which threatened danger to the new Nabob, must needs be distasteful to us; and Colonel Clive was by no means disposed to regard Monsieur Sinfray with an indulgent eye.

The man's desperate valour in the defence of one post after another had impressed me, even in that hour of confusion. I had beheld with amazement the almost superhuman activity of his movements, the demoniac fire of his eyes, as they flashed vivid lightnings on his assailants. Strangely had his image haunted me as I saw him standing high above the crowd on the summit of an earthwork, waving a sword above his head, and urging his men with wild cries and frantic oaths.

Some association of the past, some recollection vague as the memory of a dream, had flashed upon me as I saw him thus. Yet what association could this man convey to my mind, what memory of mine could be linked with the image of this stranger?

The man's face had haunted me even in the busy days that succeeded our return to Muxadavad; and I was at once startled and pleased when Mr. Watts entrusted me with a mission that would bring me into immediate contact with the stranger who had thus occupied my thoughts.

Monsieur Sinfray was to be released from the close confinement of the hospital, and be suffered to do what he pleased with himself within the boundaries of the capital, provided he were willing to give his parole against any attempt at escape. I was sent to act as interpreter for Captain Hammerton, one of the officers in Clive's command, who went to announce this favour, and to exact the usual formalities; but whose English prejudices had hindered his acquirement of Monsieur Sinfray's native tongue. We found the Frenchman standing at an open window, gazing out on the broad river and green expanse of rice-fields with a most impatient expression of countenance. He was a man of from forty-five to fifty years of age, tall, slim, muscular, and with a face which indicated a surprising activity of mind.

He turned upon us suddenly as we entered the room, his face lighted with animation, as if relieved by any interruption to the dismal monotony of his confinement. He invited us, with a careless wave of his hand, to be seated, and then flung himself on a couch opposite to our own. In all his movements I observed a kind of savage grace, which resembled rather the inborn dignity of an Arab chief than the acquired polish of an European gentleman.

"I am glad to see you," he said in French. "The solitude and confinement of this place have almost driven me mad. Great Heaven, what a fool and a craven Bassy must be to let you English win so easy a victory, while he dawdles in the Northern Circars! Had Dupleix remained in India, this could never have happened; I congratulate the French Government on the wisdom that recalled him."

He kissed the tips of his fingers and waved them westward with a contemptuous motion.

"What the deuce is the frog-eating scoundrel jabbering?" asked my companion angrily.

I took no notice of Monsieur Sinfray's rhapsody, but proceeded to explain our mission and my own office as interpreter to his military visitor.

"Tell him he can say what he has to say in English," replied Monsieur Sinfray, still in French. "I understand that language, but do not speak it."

I interpreted this to Captain Hammerton, who seemed to regard the fact as an almost incredible phenomenon. He consented, however, to address the prisoner in his own tongue, and the parole was given and accepted with all due formality on both sides.

This being done, Captain Hammerton was in haste to be gone.

"Come, Ainsleigh," he said, "I've half a dozen other duties to get through this morning."

I rose to follow him, with a parting bow to the Frenchman; but as I thus saluted M. Sinfray, I saw him gazing upon me with a fixed amazement that was most startling.

"Ainsleigh!" he exclaimed, "do you call yourself Ainsleigh?"

"I have the honour to bear that name," I replied, not without a faint blush, for, alas! I knew not whether I had any legal right to it.

"Oh, come, I say," cried the Captain, "I must be off. I can't stay parley-vooing here all day."

"Let me not detain your too courteous companion," said Monsieur Sinfray; "but you, Mr. —— Ainsleigh, be good enough to remain with me for a few minutes."

"I am in no hurry to be gone, sir," I replied; and I explained his desire to the Captain, who departed, leaving me *tête-à-tête* with M. Sinfray, whose countenance seemed to grow every instant more familiar to me, and about whom there still hung that indefinable association which had attracted and perplexed me even amid the tumult of battle.

"Ainsleigh! And your name is Ainsleigh!" he said, now addressing me in excellent English, though he had but a few minutes before declared himself unable to speak that language. "To what branch of the Ainsleighs do you belong? It is a good old name, and no doubt the family tree has put out many a new bud since I lost count of its blossoming."

I could not repress a movement of surprise at his English, which was exceptionally good.

"You speak my language like an Englishman, Monsieur Sinfray," I said.

"That is quite possible," he answered with a smile. "I am of no race, and of no nation; a cosmopolitan, soldier of fortune, citizen of the world, what you will. But you do not answer my question. I had—well, a kind of interest in this Ainsleigh family many years ago. To which of them do you belong?"

"My grandfather was a Colonel Ainsleigh, who married Lady Susan Somerton. My father was their only son—Roderick."

To my utter astonishment Monsieur Sinfray burst into a loud laugh, then crossing the room suddenly, he planted his hands upon my shoulders, and looked me in the face with a more searching gaze than I think I had ever encountered before.

"Am I mad, or are you a rogue and a liar?" he cried. "Roderick Ainsleigh's son! Do I hear aright? You call yourself the son of Roderick Ainsleigh?"

"I have never known any other name, sir."

"Great heavens, can this be true? Yes, your face tells me that it is! You are an Ainsleigh!"

"AND YOU?" I cried, overwhelmed by a sudden conviction. "'Twas *that* I saw in your face yonder, at Plassey, when you stood on the breastwork of the tank fighting as if possessed by a hundred devils;—'twas *that* I saw—the likeness to a picture at Hauteville—the portrait of my father. Oh, sir, you are my kinsman! The word chokes me. I thought myself quite alone in the world."

I grasped his hand and kissed it passionately. Renegade, adventurer, whatever he might be, it was with rapture I welcomed him to my affection. This foolish eagerness may well surprise those who boast a long list of blood-relations; but to me, for whom the word "kindred" had been no more than an empty sound, the revelation of any family-tie was delightful.

"Heavens, what a fool the boy is!" exclaimed my new-found kinsman, not without a touch of softness. "And you kiss my hand like a lover, and offer me your honest young heart, and never stop to ask whether I am a scoundrel."

"I cannot believe you that, sir; you are of my father's blood. And now pray tell me the tie between us. My father was an only son, but Colonel Ainsleigh may have had brothers of whom I never heard. You must needs descend from one of them."

"Sdeath, how fast the boy talks! I have not yet confessed myself an Ainsleigh. My name is Sangfroid, which you ignorant British corrupt into Sinfray; and I am a captain in the service of his most Christian Majesty Louis the Fifteenth."

"Nay, sir, whatever name it may have suited your convenience to assume in your adopted country, you are by birth



an Ainsleigh. It is written upon your face. Due allowance made for the difference in ages, you are the image of my father, whom I know only by his portrait at Hauteville."

"His portrait at Hauteville," repeated my kinsman, with a wonderful softness of tone. "Did that still hang in the post of honour when you saw it?"

"Alas! no, sir; it had been thrust out of sight long before I looked upon it. But it seems you know Hauteville?"

"I knew your father. You speak of him with a kind of tenderness. Have you any reason to love him?"

"I have much reason to pity him, sir."

"Ay, that is truly spoken; for if ever evil Fortune discharged her bitterest storms on one ill-fated head, 'twas that of Roderick Ainsleigh."

"Yes, sir, his life was a mistaken and unhappy one; his fate most tragic."

"His fate was tragical, was it?" asked my kinsman, with that eager look of scrutiny so natural to him. "I do not know the circumstances of his death."

"He was stabbed in a tavern brawl, sir, while my mother lay on her death-bed. It is the saddest story. The particulars of his murder—for murder it doubtless was—were not known till a fortnight after the event."

"How was he identified?"

"Only by a letter addressed to my mother which was found upon him. He lies in a nameless grave; but my cousin and benefactress, Lady Barbara Lestrangle, erected a small tablet to his memory in the Church of St. Ann, Soho."

"She did that, did she? Barbara Lestrangle did that? Bless her for that tender humanity! she is a noble soul."

"There is no purer spirit among the elect in heaven, sir. But, alas! she lives no more on earth."

"Dead!" he cried, with profound emotion. "Is Barbara dead?"

"She has been dead some years. You knew her, sir?"

"Yes, I knew and loved her—loved her passionately, truly, foolishly, jealously, unreasonably; was loved by her, and forfeited her love; played fast-and-loose with high fortune; was too proud to try to recover the affection my folly had forfeited; went my own headstrong way and lost her; and so deserved to become the wretch that loss made me. Look you, Robert,—I am not good at mystifications,—your face is an honest one, and draws me to you. The man who fell in that tavern-brawl was not Roderick Ainsleigh. Your father gave his farewell letter to a low acquaintance, to carry to your mother; and having done this went to seek his fortune abroad, confiding the poor sick creature in Monk's Alley to Providence, which would do nothing for his pleading, and yet might save so harmless an unfortunate

as she. He went, and for nigh a year Fate was against him; then came a gleam of sunshine. Fortune flung a handful of guineas into his lap, and he went back to the lodging where he had left his wife and child. Both were gone. The mother to the graveyard, the child to a prosperous home, and honourable adoption by the woman he loved best in the world. He himself was thought to be dead. What motive had he to proclaim himself among the living? His wife was gone beyond his help. His child was in a better home, and amongst more powerful friends than he, who was at best an adventurer, could hope to give him. So Roderick Ainsleigh went back to France, an exile for life, took a strange name, and was lost among the crowd of absentees whom your Hanoverian dynasty had driven thither. Do you understand me now, Robert?"

I was on my knees at his feet.

"I do, father!"

He bade me rise, and took me to his breast, in a brief soldier-like embrace.

"My only son!" he said. "What can I seem to you but the basest of men? Yet even when I went back to France I did not mean to desert you. If ever Fortune had favoured me. I should have reclaimed my own flesh and blood. Fortune never has favoured me, or those on whose side I have fought. I have lived; that is the most I can say for my prosperity."

"Oh, sir," I cried, "to me it is the truest, purest joy to find you! I have been so long alone in the world, the sport of enemies so bitter. Let me not malign Providence: I have found friends and patrons, and have been in some ways favoured by Fortune. But I will tell you my story by-and-by. And now, father, let me ask you one question—it is of all questions nearest my heart. Bitter words have been flung at me—taunts that have stung me to the quick; and though I have ever resented, I could not always gainsay them. Among the papers Lady Barbara found in Monk's Alley, there was no certificate of my mother's marriage. Her stepson, Mr. Lestrangle, doubtless knew this fact, and has taken advantage of it to call me——"

"Stop!" exclaimed my father. "If he called you any foul name, or slandered your dead mother by so much as one reproachful word, he was a liar. You are my legitimate son. When my fortune was at its highest, a chance acquaintance with old parson Lester threw me in the way of his pretty daughter. I was scarce more than a boy, and it was natural to me to pay a kind of court to every pretty woman who fell in my way. Miss Lester was rustic simplicity itself. She took my compliments more seriously than I meant them. Barbara was told of our acquaintance, and resented it; not by open jealousy, which would have brought about an explanation, but by haughty avoidance that galled my soul. Provoked by this,

I paraded my admiration of Miss Lester, never meaning, so help me Heaven! that it should go beyond common gallantry. And thus matters went on until my uncle and I quarrelled, and I was banished eternally. 'Twas a year after this, when I had fallen into a state of the direst poverty, and was lying sick in a low London lodging-house, that Miss Lester, having heard by a strange accident of my condition, abandoned her home and came to succour me. It was a wild and foolish act, doubtless, in the opinion of the worldly-wise; but if it were so, the angels who descend to comfort fallen man are wild and foolish. For several weeks I hovered betwixt life and death, and my faithful Milly watched my sick-bed. When I was strong enough to crawl out into the sunshine, I took her straight to an old City church, where we were married. Heaven knows what became of the certificate. It never struck me that the document could be of use to any one. But oh! Robert, how could you believe your father such a scoundrel as to betray the woman who trusted him?"

"Your enemies and my own persuaded me to think ill of you, sir. Thank God, I wronged you! You can never comprehend what a burden you have lifted from my soul. And now, sir, command my duty; I am your son, and obedient humble servant. Tell me what I can do to prove my fidelity. It is hard that we should be fighting on opposite sides."

"I shall never fight on your side, Robert; be sure of that; though I have little feeling for or against your trading companies of either nation. But for George of Hanover my sword shall never be drawn. I was with Charles Edward Stuart through the campaign of '45; and but for that fatal wavering of spirit which made him yield to evil counsel at Derby, I might now be serving him at his court in London. Fortune favoured my escape after Culloden, where I fought as captain of a company. I was left among the dead upon that fatal field, and woke at daybreak from a state of stupor to find my arm pierced by a bullet, and to crawl as best I might to the nearest shelter, a shepherd's cottage, where I was taken good care of, and whence I departed, a month afterwards, in the guise of a travelling hawker. In this character I got back to France, and here began my military career under Saxe, with such good fortune that I came to India several years ago a corporal, and have since won my captaincy. I am a Jacobite to the core of my heart, Robert; and if ever Fortune favours me here, I shall send her golden fruits to Rome. England has not seen the last of her rightful king, though the white horse of Hanover has ridden rampant over your liberties for the last twelve years. Do not think that the old loyal spirit is extinct there. I have friends at Rome who write me news of England."

"English news that comes to you through Rome may scarcely be trustworthy, sir. It is pretty sure to take a Jacobite flavour in that city."

"What, Robert, are you so determined a Whig?"

"I have scarce any politics, sir. I had my Jacobite fever, and survived it. I think it is a natural disease of youth, like measles. But I do not believe the English nation will ever again welcome an invader, let him come with what pretensions he may. The age of adventure is past, sir, and we are become a trading nation. We have too much to hazard by rebellion. Where idle townsmen and rabble turned out to welcome the Chevalier and his Highlanders, looms are humming and whirling, and cotton-spinning. Be assured, England's loyalty will never endanger her trade interests. We are a nation eager for peace at any price, and value commercial prosperity above the divine right of kings."

My father heard me with a gloomy countenance.

"You talk like a draper's apprentice, Robert," he said.

"I belong to a trading company, sir; and I do not believe in the Stuarts. A man who could turn back at Derby was never created to govern a great nation. Imagine Cæsar turning back on the Roman side of the Rubicon, bidding his legions recross the stream, because some weak-souled counsellor assures him success in Rome is impossible. And you were in the struggle of '45, sir? I am proud to hear that, though I am no Jacobite."

"Yes, Robert, I came over with Charles Edward, and was through it all. I got a wound, as I told you, at Culloden. That disabled me for months; and I had my share of peril and hardship before I got back to France, which was henceforward in a manner my native country. I fought at Fontenoy, and in many another skirmish, and only came to this country a year ago, after the recall of Dupleix. Sangfroid is a kind of nickname my comrades chose to bestow on me when I was a corporal, and I have stuck to it ever since, for one name is as good as another for a man who has neither kindred nor estate. Yet had you changed your name, Robert, the chances are we should never have known each other. Father and son would have met, and passed on their several ways unconscious, and the voice of Nature would have said nothing."

"Pardon me, sir; Nature cried **very sharply** to me when I saw you defending the tank."

And hereupon I described to him that strange emotion which had seized me in the moment of first beholding him, and had haunted me ever since, even amid scenes of excitement calculated to extinguish every common feeling. Then followed a long conversation, in which my father opened his heart to me. I showed him Lady Barbara's picture, which he kissed and wept over. I told him my own story, and the motives that urged my return

to England; and when the history of the past had been related, I ventured to question him as to the future.

"Are we but to meet and part, sir, like travellers journeying in opposite directions?" I asked.

"Alas! yes, Robert; I must go where duty calls me."

"And if I can persuade my friends to set you at liberty, you will rejoin M. Law?"

"Yes, Robert, such would be my duty."

"And if I accept the rank of ensign in the Company's service, which Colonel Clive has promised me—I was but a volunteer at Plassey—we may meet again as enemies."

"It is the fatal chance of our lives, Robert. But why not remain in your present position, where you are more likely to make a fortune?"

"I have acquired a taste for powder, sir, since Plassey; and—and there is something more honourable in military service than in the most trusted capacity a civil servant can occupy. Mr. Everard Lestrangle might refuse to cross swords with a clerk; but he cannot withhold satisfaction from a junior officer of Clive's. And I am bent on going back to England whenever I can obtain leave."

"To fight Everard Lestrangle?"

"I think, sir, mine is a case in which it would be worse than cowardice to forego revenge."

"By Heaven, I believe you are right, Robert! That Everard Lestrangle is a consummate scoundrel, and I doubt his father is little better. O Barbara, my divinity, my angel, why didst thou throw thyself away upon a cold-blooded, time-serving diplomatist! And she is dead! Good God, how often in the darkness of the midnight halt I have conjured her image from the mist of a swamp, or the smoke of a watch-fire, and fancied her radiant, and smiling on me! And she is dead! In my farthest wanderings, in my most despondent moments, I have always believed in the coming of a day when she and I would meet, hand to hand and heart to heart, with no cloud of pride or jealousy between us."

"And you may yet so meet, sir, in a better world."

"Hush, Robert! Am I fit for a better world?"

There came a silence after this, during which my father paced the room with a mournful countenance. It needed no words to tell me his thoughts had gone back to the past.

We had been for some hours together, and I knew not what need Mr. Watts might have had of my services in the interval. I rose softly to depart, and stood looking at my watch, when my father roused himself from that long reverie.

"You are going to leave me, Robert?"

"Yes, sir; I am bound to return to my duties. But I will come back in a few hours; and I will do my uttermost to pro-

cure your liberty. Yet I wish to Heaven you were in our own service. Do you set much value on your captaincy in the French army?"

"It is all that forty-seven years of existence have earned for me, Robert; and again I tell you I would not enter the service of your Hanoverian Elector's brood. I have served my rightful king, and am serving his friend and ally. Yes, his secret ally; in spite of that shameful arrest the other day, which was but a sop to your Hanoverian Cerberus. I am too old to turn my coat."

"And have you no thought of returning to England?"

"For what should I return?"

"To revisit the old scenes."

"To revisit the old scenes! Do you think the sight of them could ever cause anything but bitterness of heart to me? The old scenes! Shall I go there to meet the ghosts of the dead, the phantom of my own youth? I did once revisit Hauteville."

"On the night of your uncle's funeral?"

"What! was my visit known?" he asked, surprised.

"It was suspected; Mr. Grimshaw told me as much."

"Tony Grimshaw, a faithful soul who was ever true to my interests! But, Robert, answer me this. When I heard that Barbara Lestrangle had carried you to Hauteville as the child of her adoption, I thought your fortune secured for life; for I knew her to be rich, and generous as the sun itself. How is it she left you unprovided for?"

"I know not. She died intestate, and all her wealth went to her husband. It is possible that, when I had been safely put out of the way, she was taught to believe me a villain, and for that reason destroyed any will in which she may have provided for me. Again, it is possible that death took her by surprise, ere she had considered the destination of her wealth; or she may have left a will, only to be destroyed by the agents of my deadly foe."

And then I told my father the history of the burglarious attack upon Hauteville, which, happening within twenty-four hours of Lady Barbara's death, I had ever considered an inexplicable circumstance, that was likely to involve a deeper mystery than commonly belongs to such deeds.

"The occurrence at such a time was a strange coincidence," said my father; "yet it may have been no more than a coincidence. The matter will be worthy of investigation when you return to England."

"I mean to investigate it, sir. The possible loss of a fortune would affect me little; but I would fain fathom the uttermost depth of Everard Lestrangle's iniquity."

Soon after this I left my new-found father, with a most affectionate leave-taking; but not till I had obtained his consent to Mr. Watts being admitted to the secret of our relationship.

How novel were my feelings as I walked homeward after this strange interview! A father found, whom I had thought buried in an obscure grave six-and-twenty years ago—found, and to be lost again, perhaps, in a few days; since what possibility of frequent communion could there be between two soldiers of fortune in the service of different and unfriendly nations?

Even this meeting lacked the joy that should have belonged to it. It was sweet enough in the present, but offered no promise of happiness in the future. To such a mere waif and stray as myself, life was but a tangle of broken threads, a story without plot or plan, a labyrinth of petty winding ways that led I knew not whither. For me existence had no fair highway on which I might hope to meet my father again. Nor was his career a more settled one. The reckless spirit of the adventurer was stronger in him than in me; and he had no sense of loss in his homeless, friendless state. On him the past had lost all hold; and that rudder of memory by which some men steer their course over life's troubled ocean had by him been cast away, leaving him to drift upon his careless course, the veriest plaything of the wind and waves.

I told my story to Mr. Watts, who was at once surprised and interested by so romantic an occurrence.

"You are quite convinced this Captain Sangfroid is no other than Roderick Ainsleigh," he asked, "and that you have not been made the subject of an imposture?"

"What motive could there be for imposture, sir? My father desires nothing from me; it was I who volunteered to ask for his liberty. None but my father could be familiar with the events of which this man spoke to-day. Truth has a language of its own, sir, that the veriest blockhead understands. Nor do I depend on words alone; Nature has set her mark upon us. I think, could you but see us together, you would have little doubt of our relationship."

Upon this my kind patron promised that he would do his utmost to secure the prisoner's release; a task which would be far from easy, since Olive was much provoked against the late Nabob's French contingent, who were thought to be fugitives from Chandernagore, by whose hands the English factory at Cassimbazar had been burned and destroyed some short time before.

I went on the same day to make inquiries about Omichund, whom I had left in so piteous a condition. On entering the house he occupied when resident in this city, I was told that he was no better. Native doctors had been in attendance upon him for some days and nights, and an English surgeon sent by Colonel Clive had also been with him.

I begged to be allowed to see him, and the servants conducted me to a room which I judged to belong to the women's apartments, where I found the unhappy wretch sitting on the floor.

with Tara standing over him, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon him with mournful solicitude. Juggernaut Sing was absent from the city, or I should assuredly have been refused admittance to this chamber.

The old man's countenance and attitude most perfectly embodied the idea of despair. I think, could David Garrick have seen him at this moment, the picture might have afforded some suggestion even to that great artist, who has perhaps little need to copy reality, having so profound an imagination from which to draw the correct image of every passion. I stood lost in the contemplation of that awful figure—the fixed and death-like countenance, in which the eyes alone seemed yet alive, and these flashed a preternatural fire, an unholy brightness, as of a spirit in hell—the attenuated hands lying open on the carpet, the palms upwards, the fingers slowly closing and opening every moment, as if in the act of clutching that sordid dross for which this mean soul so hungered.

For some minutes I gazed at him in silence; then, turning to Tara, I inquired how long he had remained in this condition.

"From the hour in which they brought him home, on that miserable day. Ah, saheb, was it well to deceive the old man? If he claimed too much, you could surely have refused his claim. Was it wise, or brave, or noble, to use him thus?"

"State policy has cruel necessities, Tara; your grandfather threatened us."

"But he would never have fulfilled this threat. His fortunes were bound with yours. It was but an old man's foolish anger."

"And the doctors can do nothing for him?"

"Nothing, saheb. The mind has gone. Their medicines cannot bring that back. They come and gaze upon him, watch and listen, and then leave us, shaking their heads mournfully. They give him medicines to make him sleep; but the relief of slumber is not granted to him. His eyes have never closed in sleep since that day."

"Is he always thus?"

"With but little change. He has never been his old self, not for one moment, since they brought him home. He talks sometimes to himself, not to us. His thoughts are always on the same subject."

My eyes were upon him as she told me this. Though we stood close to him, it was but too evident our voices produced not the faintest impression upon his sense. The bony fingers still continued their unvarying motions, now spreading themselves wide, now clutched convulsively, as if they held the wealth of an empire. Looking upon the old man thus, I was struck by something which I had not before observed, namely, the richness of his dress, which was such as I had never seen him wear before. The costliest embroideries of gold and gems



covered his loose robe; his habitual skull-cap of greasy silk was exchanged for a jewelled head-dress which the proudest of India's rajahs might have worn at a royal wedding-feast; and wherever it was possible to place a jewel about the old man's dress, there shone a gem of imperial splendour.

Nothing could have been more ghastly than the contrast between this splendour of apparel and the cadaverous visage of the wearer. Idiocy in its rags and crown of straw may present a deplorable picture; but madness in royal state has a surpassing awfulness not to be described.

"Why have they decked him out with these gewgaws?" I asked of Tara.

"By his own wish. He insisted upon wearing his richest robes, and would not rest until they were brought to him. We are but too glad to humour every whim, in the hope of improving his condition."

"He must have some fancy in connection with these robes," I said.

"Yes," answered the girl, with a reproachful gaze; "he fancies that the English have kept their promises to him. You will hear him say so presently, doubtless, for it is of that alone he talks. He believes himself rich, and wears these garments as a token of his state."

"And he *is* rich, Tara; he must be a wealthy man without the exorbitant price which he would fain have exacted from the English for a fidelity which we had a right to expect without payment. Your grandfather is still a rich man. He has obtained restitution of his losses at Calcutta, he has obtained the payment of moneys lent by him to the Rajah of Purneah, and I know not what hoards he may not have besides. Why, those very jewels with which he has decked himself are worth a fortune. Are the English to blame because his greed of gain is insatiable?"

"They are to blame for having deluded him with a false promise. They are to blame for *this*."

She pointed at him with an expressive gesture, as if she would have said, "O England, behold this wreck of humanity! It is your work."

At this moment the old man's eyes rolled slowly towards me, and for the first time since I had entered the room he seemed conscious of my presence.

"Yes," he said, nodding at me with an idiotic smile; "the English are a just people. They keep faith—they keep faith! Omichund trusted them, and he has his reward. A whisper, a look from him might have ruined all; for the Nabob's suspicions never slept. A look from Omichund might have been ruin and death to the English. But he was true; and they—they have been true!"

After this came a pause, during which he looked downward at a necklace of pearls and uncut emeralds that hung upon his breast.

"These robes and jewels are not rich enough for a man of my wealth," he said; "they are paltry. Let me have embroidery of gold and diamonds only, rich as the Mogul wore when Delhi was great. What, you do not know how rich I am! You cannot guess the reward these English have given me. Crores of rupees! 'Twas written in the sealed treaty. 'I swear by God, and the Prophet of God!' so runs the Persian oath. I say it was in the treaty. I made them promise that, lest by some chance I should be cheated at the last. It was written on red paper the colour of the English blood that would have been shed if the old Gentoo had turned traitor. Blood! I could have flooded the streets of Muxadavad with blood, had I betrayed the English and their ally, Meer Jaffier!"

Thus he rambled on at intervals as long as I remained with him, always harping on his wealth and the good faith of the English. I need scarce say that every word gave me the keenest pain; for whatever justification there may have been for the act that had overthrown Omiehund's reason, this melancholy result was none the less to be deplored. Strange, that the massacre of his household should leave his intellect unimpaired, and the disappointment of his avarice reduce him to idiocy! He was indeed a creature in whom the love of gold had ever been a passion but one step removed from madness.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### I ACQUIRE CERTAINTY.

I HAD the happiness to win my father's release from Colonel Clive through the intercession of my ever kind friend Mr. Watts; and this favour was but the signal for our parting, with only the vaguest hope of meeting again, when or where we dared not speculate.

I think my father's heart yearned towards me in those few days of frequent intercourse which we enjoyed at Muxadavad, and that it grieved him to bid me farewell.

"You will go back to England, Robert, and I to France, whenever my regiment returns thither, always supposing I live to accompany it. I will give you an address in the city of Paris whence a letter is sure to reach me sooner or later, if I am above ground; and you must tell me where I can write to you in London. Stay; under cover to Mr. Swinfen. That will be a safe address, will it not?"

"The best in the world, sir; and, indeed, I think the only one I could give you. And now tell me, sir,—I am a young man, and you yourself in the prime of life; Fortune may yet favour

one or both of us;—if I can ever make a home in England, will you come and share it?

"A home, Robert! What does that mean? 'Tis a word I never could understand. A roving devil entered me when I was a boy, and has tugged at my heartstrings ever since, dragging me now here, now there, by land and sea. I once shared a garret with thy mother, poor devoted soul; and if I could have got bread for her and thee, should not have deserted it. Since then I have been a wanderer, with a past so sad, I dare not look back upon it, and with a blank for my future. Nay, Robert, do not look so sadly at me. If I live to be a battered old grey-beard, and thou wilt give me a corner at thy hearth, I will come and smoke my pipe there, and tell stories of Lauffield and Bergen-op-Zoom, St. Thomé and Gingee, and dandle thy little ones on my feeble old knees. But that is a long way to look forward. In the meantime be sure that I love thee."

And so we parted. One gift I was able to offer my father as a memento of this strange meeting, and I doubt if all Omichund's jewels would have seemed to him a treasure so precious. I had contrived, since our first encounter, to get Lady Barbara's miniature copied on ivory by a Hindoo. The colours were somewhat too vivid, and the stippling, though performed with an amazing neatness, lacked the softness of Miss Kauffman or Cosway; but poor as the art was, the likeness was a fair one, and the gift was received with rapture.

There now came a kind of lull in the affairs of this province, though the horizon was by no means cloudless. In the first expansive impulse of gratitude, or perchance with the hope that by rewarding the chief he might escape some part of his engagements to the subordinates, Meer Jaffier presented Colonel Clive with a sum of money that I have heard computed at one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. This gift our hero took without scruple, but refused presents of a yet larger amount from the Seits, and other wealthy inhabitants of the capital. Nay, had he been of the unscrupulous nature which his enemies loved to depict him, there are no limits to the wealth he might have acquired, or to the power he might have seized. When he was afterwards called upon to defend his acceptance of Meer Jaffier's bounty, he did it with a boldness that gave evidence of a clear conscience, and with a logic that none could dispute.

In Calcutta, where of late had prevailed discontent and anxiety, there now arose a spirit of universal rejoicing. Fortunes that had been thought annihilated were now restored, and the sunshine of prosperity illumined a city where Desolation had long held her gloomy reign. I think, at this juncture, while the money won from Meer Jaffier's reluctance, by him alone, was pouring into the Company's treasury, the people whom Robert Clive had redeemed from despair entertained some

faint sense of gratitude for his services. Yet even at this early stage the spirit of dissension had arisen. The distribution of the donations to the army and navy was not made without a display of ill-feeling on the part of the recipients, and a small body of military officers protested against an equal division of the Nabob's bounty with the officers and sailors of the squadron which had accompanied the army to Plassey. These malcontents Clive was compelled to remind, with that undaunted frankness which was natural to him, that a sum of money obtained from the Nabob solely by his negotiation was not a matter of right, or property to be disposed of by their vote.

"So far from that," wrote the Colonel in a letter, of which a copy was forwarded by him to Mr. Watts, "it is now in my power to return to the Nabob the money already advanced, and leave it to his option whether he will perform his promise or not. You have stormed no town and found the money there; neither did you find it in the plains of Plassey after the defeat of the Nabob. In short, gentlemen, it pains me to remind you that what you are to receive is entirely owing to the care I took of your interest."

He then went on to declare that he would consent to no injustice towards the navy, and begged to retract his promise of negotiating the payment of the Nabob's bounty.

This speedily brought these discontented gentlemen to the dust, and they were as cordially forgiven as they had been sharply reprimanded.

And now occurred an event which shed a gloom over our victory, in the sudden death of that brave and honourable seaman, Admiral Watson, who perished of a putrid fever on the 3rd of August, and within six weeks of our victory at Plassey.

It was shortly after this calamity that the dearest wish of my soul was fulfilled, and I found myself free to return to England. My humble services and the real dangers which I had endured at Muxadavad, were deemed by Mr. Watts and the committee worthy of a reward I should never have dreamed of; and my patron surprised me one morning by the gift of bills for three thousand pounds.

"It was the Colonel's doing, Robert," said Mr. Watts, when I expressed my surprise at this bounty; "he said you deserved as much as that for your spirited journey to Meer Jaffier's palace, and as much more for having been through the fire with me, to say nothing of your service as a volunteer at Plassey. There were some black looks among our friends of the select committee when he said this, as you may guess, and they were for giving you six months' extra pay as a sufficient reward for having lived for several months in daily peril of impalement or decapitation. Upon this the Colonel swore that you should have the money, even if it must needs come out

of his own purse. 'And it is not the first time I have stood between you and a meanness, gentlemen,' he added, in his grandest manner. Of course this brought them to their senses; for though I daresay they would have had no objection to the Colonel's rewarding you from his own pocket, they have a great terror of offending him. So the item was passed with a smothered groan: 'Three thousand pounds sterling to Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, clerk and interpreter.'

"I know not how to thank the Colonel, or you, sir."

"Nay, Robert, 'tis no more than you deserve; for you have been vastly useful. But this money is not to be your sole reward. In acknowledgment of your services at Plassey, the Colonel intends giving you the rank of ensign, with two years' leave of absence. I told him you were very eager to obtain military rank."

"Oh, sir," I cried, fairly overcome by such thoughtful kindness, "this is too much!" I could say no more; this shower of gifts almost bewildered me. I was free to return to England, an ensign in the Honourable East India Company's service; a rank that was modest enough, but one to which Everard Lestrange could not deny the right of a gentleman. I was in a position to prove my legitimacy, to annul my hateful marriage; and I held in my hands the nucleus of a decent fortune. What more could I have asked? What more!—if Dora had still been free. But, alas! she was lost to me for ever, since, should any encounter between her husband and myself prove fatal to him, she was of a nature too noble to permit her acceptance of a hand stained with his blood, however fairly he might come by his death, however dearly she might love his slayer.

"How dare I think of her as still loving me?" I asked myself angrily. "Because life has stood still for me since the hour in which I was severed from her, am I so weak a fool as to suppose time has made no change in her? Nor are our positions in any manner identical, for while I have guarded her image pure and stainless, she has been taught to think of me as a liar and a villain, unworthy of so much as one thought of hers."

I told myself this, and yet I longed with no less eagerness to return to Europe, to look once more upon the face that had been with me in so many an exile's dream of home. When I reached England, I might hear of Mrs. Lestrange abroad, at St. Petersburg, at Hanover, at Venice—wherever the diplomatic service might take her husband; but in whatever country she might be, if she still lived upon this earth, I was determined to see her, to prove to her that I had never been the false wretch my enemies had taught her to think me.

If she still lived! Chilling as a sudden blast from the frozen pole came the thought that she might be dead. From mortality's

common foe neither youth nor beauty would exempt her; and there was never an English newspaper came to me that did not contain the tidings of some unexpected doom—a husband swept off in the prime of manhood by a fever, a family extinguished by malignant sore throat. Death was ever busy among the homes of the great, and medical science seemed powerless to cope with the destroyer. Her name I had never seen among the ranks of the dead; but many events may escape the knowledge of an exile who thinks himself fortunate if he sees a newspaper or a London magazine once in six months.

I sailed for England in the *Prince Edward*, a noble vessel, which performed the voyage in less than seven months. Yet even this transit, rapid as it was compared with the progress of the *Hecate*, seemed slow to my impatience. No longer was I cooped in a Pandemonium between decks; I now enjoyed all the luxuries permitted to the sea-voyager; but I should have been inhuman had I not sometimes visited the lower deck, on which numerous disabled soldiers were being conveyed back to England. With these poor wretches I spent some time daily, and was enabled to obtain certain small indulgences for them from the skipper, a very superior person to the brute with whom it had been my ill-luck to sail on board the *Hecate*.

It was bleak March weather when I landed at Portsmouth; but no words can describe the rapture with which I inhaled the chill wind of my native country, and gazed on the mean house-tops and steeples of the little naval town, with all its common sights and sounds. The dingy inn where I put up for the night seemed a palace, and I was delighted with the novel sensation of being somewhat uncereemoniously served by one free-and-easy waiter, instead of the stately crowd of slavish Oriental servants, who attended the dinner-table of Mr. Watts and myself as if it had been a banquet of the gods. I cannot, however, go so far as to say that the steak which composed my dinner seemed to me a happy exchange for the pilaus and curries, the various fish, fruits, and vegetables of Hindostan; but I was in no humour to be critical as to what I ate, being in a fever of impatience that deprived me of all appetite.

I started for London at daybreak next morning, on the top of a stage-coach drawn by six horses, which seemed to me a thing of supernatural speed after the wearisome slowness of a palanquin; but even by this rapid mode of travelling I did not reach the city till the dead of night, and was fain to await the advent of morning at an inn in the Borough, where I was put into a room looking out on a covered gallery, much like that where I had lain on my first coming to London. Nor did I sleep more soundly than on that never-to-be-forgotten night; now, as then, I came friendless to a strange city, and though I carried a small fortune in my pocket, I think I would have gladly bartered my

three thousand pounds for the certainty that a single friend would welcome my return.

I breakfasted as early as London habits would allow, and found myself in the streets at an hour when the city had still a half-awakened look, shutters scarcely unclosed, and stout country wenches bawling, "Milk, maids below!" at every area. On London Bridge I found workmen busy taking down the ruinous old houses which here impeded the thoroughfare, narrowing the roadway to but twenty feet, and in some places only twelve feet. I was not sorry to see this reformation; for though the effect of these old many-gabled houses overhanging the river, like a street suspended by some magical enchantment betwixt sky and water, was very pleasing to the lover of the picturesque, the narrow space afforded for all kinds of traffic was a most serious nuisance, and the cause of many accidents. This improvement, which I thus saw in its commencement, progressed with the slowness common to public works, and was not completed till 1760, in which year His Majesty George the Third, our present gracious King, began to reign over us.

On the Middlesex side of the bridge I took a hackney-coach, and bade the man drive me to St. James's Square, for I considered that at Sir Marcus Lestrangle's residence I should most easily obtain tidings of her I came to seek. The Indian sun, to which I had exposed myself somewhat recklessly, and seven years of absence, had so much altered me, that I hardly feared recognition, whomsoever I might meet.

I found the house in St. James's Square, with but one unshrouded window, just opening itself to the March sunshine, like a fashionable belle who lifts one languid eyelid when all the working world has been long astir.

I alighted and knocked boldly, determined to run all hazards rather than remain unsatisfied. The same gigantic porter who had answered my questions seven years before appeared in response to my summons, as little changed in face, figure, dress, or bearing, as if he had been some servitor of fairy legend, and had spent the interval in an enchanted sleep.

I had suffered and seen so much in my absence that I was unreasonably surprised by the unchanged appearance of this man. Seven years! Great Heaven! Did I judge by my own feelings, I should estimate the period a century. Seven years, and my noble benefactress, whom I had left in the pride of womanhood and beauty, was mouldering in her grave! Seven years, and I returned to find myself doubtless despised and forgotten by the only woman I had ever loved!

I asked the porter if Sir Marcus Lestrangle were in London. He shook his head, and regarded me with a wondering stare.

"Sir *Everard* Lestrangle and his lady will be in town to-morrow, sir," he said; "they are on a visit in Surrey."

"Sir Everard Lestrangle! Is Sir Marcus dead? I asked.

"Sir Marcus Lestrangle has been dead nearly two years, sir. This house now belongs to his only son Sir Everard, and his lady."

"Miss Hemsley that was?" I asked; for the sense of a great lapse of time again seized upon me, and it seemed but too possible that Dora might be dead, and some second wife installed in her place.

"Miss Hemsley that was," replied the porter solemnly, and then asked if I would leave my name.

"No," I said, "the name is of no consequence. I will wait upon Sir Everard in a day or two—here or elsewhere. He frequents some club, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; my master is to seen at White's, in St. James's Street, by his friends, who are mostly members of the club."

There was a covert insolence in this which I fully understood. The porter would have me to know that his master was not accessible to any copper-visaged stranger who might seek an interview with him.

"Lady Lestrangle is well?" I asked; and to soften this pompous Cerberus I here slipped a guinea into his ready hand.

"Yes, sir, my lady is vastly well," he replied with friendly eagerness. "Would your honour step in and rest a bit, while I answer any inquiries you may please to make about the family? Your honour has lately returned from foreign parts, I think?"

"Yes, from—" I hesitated a moment as I was about to pronounce the word "India:" that one word, repeated to Sir Everard, might have betrayed my identity, and I wanted to spend some little time in England before he knew of my return—"from Spain."

"Dearey me! The late Sir Marcus and his lady spent many years in Spain. Would your honour please to sit?"

I had entered the hall, a lofty apartment paved with gray marble, and distinguished by a dismal splendour. Never till this moment had I penetrated even so far into this house, and I looked around me curiously. 'Twas here she lived; I fancied her slight figure flitting up and down the broad staircase, her little hand lightly resting on the grim bronze balustrade.

"Yes, sir," said the porter, completely mollified by my donation; "my lady is well, or as well as a lady of quality can be, that is out at theatres and routs, and Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and such like, every night of her life, and at sales of pictures and cur'osities almost every day."

"What! she leads a life of pleasure—she loves the amusements of the town?" I said, with an unreasonable sense of bitterness. Because my life had been one long mourning, did I think she too must needs be desolate?

"Yes, sir; my lady is obleeged to do as other ladies of her station, and Sir Everard likes to see her happy."



"Happy!" I exclaimed involuntarily; "and that is called happiness!"

The porter scrutinized me sharply.

"You are some relative of my lady's, perhaps, sir?" he asked.

"No; but I come from one who is much interested in her welfare. I hope to see her soon after her return to town; yet I would rather you did not mention my visit either to Sir Everard or my lady;" and to give emphasis to this hint I slipped a supplementary crown into the man's hand.

"I shall not say a word, sir," he replied, as he ushered me to the door.

She was well, she was happy, her life a round of fashionable dissipation, and she had forgotten me. This seemed to me the sum of what I have heard; and although in my fondest dream I could scarce had hoped to find myself remembered or regretted, it was nevertheless a pain to me to hear of her gaiety.

"Fool!" I exclaimed within myself, "what other fate couldst thou expect? Her love for thee was but a girlish fancy, born of her distaste for thy rival; and thou gone, and the rival thrust upon her, she has reconciled herself to her fate, and takes life gaily, like other women of quality."

Thus did I argue with myself; yet so crestfallen was I, that, on the simple strength of this porter's intelligence, I had half a mind to go back to India by the next ship that would carry me thither. Better to be facing Meer Jaffier's foes on the borders of Behar than to suffer these pangs of jealous anguish in a country where I had not one single friend. With the strange perversity of human nature, I, who had so languished to return to England, now felt that my coming had been but a folly. It seemed that I had scarce a purpose in this great city, to which I had hastened with such burning impatience.

The invalidation of my marriage? Yes, that was a task to perform; but of what avail the undoing of those rites where the whom alone I loved was the happy wife of another? What else had I expected to find her? Had I hoped to discover her a widow waiting for my return? Alas! I knew not what I hoped; I knew only that I had found disappointment.

I carried Philip Hay's letter and statement in a pocket-book that I wore always about me; and provided with this I returned to the City and sought out Mr. Blade's office in Little Britain. I found this office a darksome den in a somewhat dingy locality, and Mr. Blade himself struck me as a kind of practitioner better versed in the exercise of legal chicanery than in the nobler offices of the law; a man who would take to a doubtful case with a natural relish, and be more at his ease in the darkest labyrinth of fraud than in the broad highway of honesty.

This gentleman received me with amazing civility, and seemed really moved when I told him of Philip Hay's fate.

"That man's disappearance has always been a puzzle to me, sir," he said; "and I much regretted his loss as client, companion, and friend. In the first capacity he was of little profit to me directly, for I believe he never paid a debt in his life; but I am bound to confess that he put me in the way of two or three very good things with his young patron, Lord Mallandaine. There was an affair on Hounslow Heath, sir, an assault and abduction, which might have resulted in a most prodigious scandal, implicating more than one member of the peerage, if a man had not been found, sir—Jumping Joseph, a young man very well known upon the road—who was tried and hung, sir, for that very affair; and I think I may venture to say, by my agency alone."

"What!" I exclaimed, aghast at this horrid avowal; "an innocent man was executed for a crime of Lord Mallandaine's! and you are proud of the transaction?"

"An innocent man! No, my dear sir, Jumping Joseph had earned a halter a dozen times over; but it was not he who ran away with pretty Miss Lockson of Holford Hall, Wiltshire, and left her father for dead in his own travelling carriage, though a train of circumstantial evidence, which I had the honour to prepare, brought it home to him in the most convincing manner. The hemp was grown, and the yarn was spun, my dear sir; it was only a question who should put the rope round his neck."

"And my Lord Mallandaine's victim, this Miss Lockson?"

Mr. Blade shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot say for certain what became of the girl," he said. "Twas murmured in her father's neighbourhood that she wandered home one day about a year after the abduction, somewhat touched in the head, and would never speak the name of her betrayer. But your country folks have a knack of inventing these romantic stories. The history of Lord Mallandaine's victims would fill a big book."

"Does the wretch still live?" I asked.

"Live? yes; and is counted of some importance in his party. 'Twas but the other night he stood up in the House of Lords to denounce the reputed author of an immoral poem, with whom he was not long ago on terms of warm friendship.—But I ramble, sir; so to business."

I gave him Philip Hay's letter, which he at once acknowledged as genuine, but was not so prompt to hand me the box containing the papers.

"There is one circumstance our lamented friend appears to have forgotten," he said, with a smothered sigh.

"And pray what is that?"

"The fact that he left these herein-named papers with me as a—ahem!—a kind of security for my claim against him."

"I have no knowledge of that, Mr. Blade. nor, I dare ven-

ture to say, had Mr. Hay any notion you would advance such a claim. He spoke of you as a friend rather than as a lawyer."

"I am flattered by the friendship of a man who possessed all the elements of greatness," replied Mr. Blade; "but, as the father of a family, I am bound to remember my claim against our lamented friend, which includes costs out of pocket."

"But you are also bound to remember that these papers are of no intrinsic value——"

"They are of value to you, my dear sir," interposed the lawyer, with a wily grin, "or you would scarce take the trouble to come after them."

This was an unanswerable argument; so I replied to my gentleman with more candour than such a knave deserved at my hands.

"I have reason to believe there is one document in that box of importance to myself," I said; "but I am very sure there is no paper in it of the smallest intrinsic value."

"Intrinsic value is one thing, sir, and personal value another. I never supposed that my lamented friend had left bank-notes or India stock in my keeping. But there is no commodity of such fluctuating value as private papers. I have seen a gentleman's note of hand, and a lady's love-letter, sold at a price that would astound you."

"No evidence of a fine gentleman's iniquity or a fine lady's folly would astonish me, sir. But to return to Mr. Hay's papers."

"To return to those papers, sir. You will perceive, in the first place, that I have an equitable lien upon them in the shape of my bill of costs; and in the second place, had I no such lien, I should not be authorized in handing them to you on the strength of that letter."

"What can be plainer than this letter, Mr. Blade?"

"Nothing, if the writer were still alive, and the property his to dispose of. But the writer's life having lapsed in the interim, the papers in question belong to his next of kin, who, on taking out letters of administration, would be able to claim these with the other effects of the deceased."

"Good heavens, sir, what do you mean by letters of administration? You must be aware that Philip Hay lived and died a pauper."

"I am aware of nothing relative to the last six years of his life, sir; and in the eye of the law he has an estate which must be administered according to the law in such cases made and provided. And I, sir, as a gentleman and an attorney, would be guilty of a gross misdemeanour—nay, indeed a fraud upon Mr. Hay's heirs, executors, and assigns—should I hand you the aforesaid papers on the strength of that letter."

This was beyond measure provoking, and I was sorely tempted to lose patience with Mr. Blade.

"Come, come, sir," I said; "I doubt there is some little mis-

take here. My bronzed face deceives you, and you fancy because I have come from the Indies I must needs be a greenhorn in all matters of business. Allow me to tell you that I was a civil servant of the Company, and that my duties brought me in hourly contact with the natives of Hindostan, who are the veriest rogues and knaves that live upon this earth. A man who has dealt for six years with them, sir, has little to learn in chicanery, and will scarce submit to be defrauded of his honest rights by a knavish perversion of justice."

"You are impertinent, sir," replied Mr. Blade, with an air of dignity, "and since you choose to advance your claim in an offensive manner, I shall stick to the letter of the law, and hereby refuse to surrender that box to any one but the lawful administrator of the late Mr. Philip Hay's effects."

There was a resolution about the scoundrel's tone that told me he was only to be countered by equal resolution on my part. Should I show any desire to conciliate him, or to bargain with him, he would suppose the paper to be of vital importance to me, and would do his utmost to bleed me of my last guinea.

"Very well, sir," I said, rising and putting on my hat; "in that case there is no more to be done. If the letter of the law will not give me the paper my friend desired me to have, I must e'en do without it. I have too much respect for the law to tempt you to a breach of it. Good morning."

Mr. Blade stared at me for a moment dumbfounded; but as I moved towards the door, he skipped suddenly forward and placed himself before it.

"Not so hastily, sir!" he exclaimed; "you had best, at any rate, leave me your name and address. In this letter you are but spoken of as the bearer. If I find I can strain the law in your favour, I——"

"I would not have you burden your conscience to do me a service, sir. My name and address are of no importance. Be so good as to move away from that door; I have engagements elsewhere, and am somewhat hurried."

"Sir," cried Mr. Blade in an appealing tone, "between men of business this is childish. You want a paper from that box, or you would not have come to Little Britain. What will you give for that paper?"

"I decline to treat with you on the subject, sir. If my friend's desire gives me no sufficient claim to the paper, I will have none of it."

"Sir, this is mere histrionic display. You want the paper. Give me Bank-of-England notes for a hundred pounds, and it is yours."

"I will not higgler for it, sir."

"Come, come, sir; say fifty. 'Tis not half my bill of costs."

"I have no money about me, sir, and can very well exist without the paper;" and I made another move towards the door.

"Bring me five-and-twenty guineas, sir, and it is yours. 'Twill barely cover my costs out of pocket; but the father of a family is the plaything of Fortune;" and at this juncture Mr. Blade brushed away an imaginary tear with his dingy ruffle. "I blush to sink so low, sir, but as the father of a family I will take five-and-twenty guineas. In the words of Shakspeare's Apothecary, 'My poverty,'—but no, sir, I will not trouble you with a hackneyed quotation. If you would let me have the money before two o'clock this afternoon, I should take it kindly."

"You shall have it, Mr. Blade. I do not much affect this kind of barter; but as I have trespassed on your time, I shall be happy to make you some recompense, and will bring you the money you demand at two o'clock."

"Sir, God bless you! I despise my weakness in thus allowing the feelings of a father to vanquish at once the principles and instincts of a legal practitioner; but the times are bad; there is positively nothing doing, sir, nothing."

I left Mr. Blade, and hastened to deposit the bulk of the bills Mr. Watts had given me with a banker, to whom the same kind friend had recommended me. A couple of hundred pounds I kept in hand; and as I thought it but likely there might be something outlandish in my appearance, and as I had no desire to be remarkable, I went at once to a respectable tailor in the City, and bade him measure me for a suit of clothes in the plainest modern style. He would fain have persuaded me to choose some gaudy hue, such as that bloom colour which my dear friend Goldsmith afterwards made so famous; but I selected a cloth of a dark sober green, which, when he saw me resolute to have it, Mr. Snip declared was the genteelst thing in his shop. But even after this I had some difficulty in leaving him without giving an order for a scarlet shag frock, without which he declared no gentleman's wardrobe could be complete. This done, I was fairly puzzled when the man asked me where he should send the goods, and could give him no better address than the inn where I had put up. From the tailor's I went to a barber, who dressed and powdered my hair after the prevailing fashion, and tried hard to persuade me to buy a wig, recommending me one entirely of human hair, and in a style which he called Jehu's Jemmy, for it seems that fine gentlemen had of late been seized with a passion for resembling their coachmen. After this he showed me a scratch, which he called the genuine Blood's skull-covering. But finding me unmoved by the exhibition of these, he produced one of a monstrous size and feathery appearance, which he told me was known amongst men about town as the Apothecary's Bush. This last he pressed upon me as the *ne plus ultra* in taste. The price of this modish head-piece he informed me was six guineas, adding, by way of apology, that human hair was now fetching three guineas an ounce.

"And, pray, where do you get this human hair?" I asked.

"That, sir, is one of the secrets of the trade. We import from Germany, sir, and we buy British hair from the public institutions of this city."

"From the prisons and hospitals, I suppose," I hazarded.

"Well, sir, I confess Sir John Fielding and the gaoler's shears send us many a handsome head of hair. Nor do we inquire too curiously into the origin of the article, provided the quality be unimpeachable. Let me tempt you to try that Apothecary's Bush, sir. With a dark complexion like yours, the effect of those frizzy curls is killing."

"Nay, my good friend, I am but newly returned from the East, and am not yet enough in the mode to prefer the hair of some Mistress Doll Tearsheet to that with which Nature has clothed my head."

I left the barber deprecating my want of taste, and went straight to Mr. Blade's office, it being now close upon two o'clock.

I found the lawyer seated at his desk, with a shabby little tin box before him. It was securely sealed with a cipher that I had seen used by Everard Lestrangle; and I thus perceived how close the intimacy had been between these two men at the time of my undoing.

Having paid Mr. Blade the stipulated five-and-twenty guineas, I broke the seal and opened the box. It contained a packet of letters written by Everard Lestrangle to Philip Hay; and these I read. I had received the owner's permission to use them against the writer; but this I had no intention to do. I desired only to obtain a yet fuller comprehension of Mr. Lestrangle's character than his iniquitous conduct to myself and Margery Hawker had already afforded me.

The letters were in great part incomprehensible to me, so lavishly did the writer employ cant phrases that seemed to constitute a kind of secret language between Philip and himself. But of that which was plain to any reader there was enough to stamp the author of these epistles as a consummate villain. Profligacy and heartlessness were revealed in every line; and when I read those portions of the correspondence in which the seducer alluded to Margery Hawker, my detestation of this man reached a supreme degree it had not attained before. Alas, poor victim of a libertine's caprice, couldst thou have seen those lines in which he described the passion thou didst mistake for love, thy bruised heart must have broken at once! And this wretch was the husband of the pure and gentle creature I had known in the happy, unforgotten days at Hauteville. I shuddered as I thought of a union between beings so opposite. Could I marvel that my lady spent her days and nights in a round of fashionable pleasures? For her there could be no such word as home.



I looked up presently from the letters, and saw Mr. Blade staring at me with an astonished countenance, which I doubt not was warranted by my own scowling face.

"Upon my honour, sir, I should have thought you had found a nest of scorpions in that box instead of a bundle of old letters," he said.

"There are viler things than scorpions, Mr. Blade—the thoughts of a bad man. Do you know Mr.—nay, Sir Everard Lestrangle?"

"I once had the pleasure to be of some service to him, sir, in a delicate transaction. My honour as a professional man forbids me to reveal——"

"Oh, sir, I should be the last to question you upon the subject. Mr. Lestrangle did me a most foul injury some seven years ago, and I mean to have redress. Beyond this point I have no interest in him. Where is he most easily to be met?"

"Humph! It is some time since I have been employed by him; but there are certain distinguished characters upon whom a man of the world, and the father of a family like myself, feels it a duty to keep an eye. Since St. Everard's return from St. Petersburg he has abandoned the onerous paths of diplomacy, and has become solely a man of pleasure. His father's death gave him a handsome fortune; for Sir Marcus, although himself a poor man, had inherited largely from his wife, who died suddenly, leaving him a very fine estate, which now belongs to Sir Everard. He is a member of White's, attends the debates and votes with the Ministry, but seldom or never speaks. He is said to play high, and is a hanger-on of the two patent theatres, where he may be seen paying his court to the younger and prettier of the actresses. This, sir, is what I am told of the gentleman. My own humble opportunities do not permit me to come in contact with him."

"I thank you for your information, sir, so far as it goes. I find here the one paper which I especially require; and now if you please to accept ten guineas as the price of the remainder, which you can examine before parting with them, I am willing to take them."

"Ten guineas is really so contemptible a sum, sir."

"It is offered for a most contemptible commodity. If you will take the trouble to glance over those papers, you will perceive they are but the letters of a libertine written to his vernal instrument. It is a correspondence between Don Juan and Sganarelle, Mr. Blade."

"These letters might fetch me more money from Sir Everard Lestrangle himself, sir."

"If you think that, you had best keep them."

"Say fifty pounds, sir, and the letters are yours."

The little comedy which we had performed in the morning was

now repeated, and I finally consented to give twenty guineas for the remaining contents of the case. Amongst the letters I had found two containing allusions to that villanous plot of which I had been the victim,—allusions which would hardly have been clear to a stranger, but which must needs be sufficiently obvious to any one familiar with previous relations between myself and the writer.

"These shall justify me in the sight of Dorothea Lestrange," I said to myself, "if I survive an encounter with her husband."

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### ON THE TRACK OF MY ENEMY.

AFTER leaving Mr. Blade, with the certificate of Philip Hay's marriage and Sir Everard's letters safely bestowed in my pocket-book, I took a hasty dinner at a tavern not far from Little Britain. Here I lingered some time to read the papers, which were full of laudation of Mr. Pitt, that master-spirit of statecraft, who was fast doing for England what Clive had begun so gloriously for India. For years past our country had lain in a kind of stupor—inglorious and despised abroad, unprosperous at home, accepting peace at the price of fame and honour, and studying economy in that miserly spirit which is but too sure to result in ultimate loss.

Upon this scene of despondency and inaction appeared Pitt, and these peace-loving politicians found themselves bound to the chariot-wheels of the very genius of war. Already he had heated his colleagues and his country with the fire of his own ambition, and so moved his hearers by a noble panegyric upon King Frederick of Prussia, that an annual subsidy to this monarch of six hundred and seventy thousand pounds was voted by acclamation. This had occurred in December of the year last past, after the victories of Rossbach and Lissa had elevated the King of Prussia—whom we have since known to be a declared infidel—into our Protestant hero.

I was pleased to hear from a gentleman with whom I conversed at this tavern that the prime minister had also offered a handsome tribute to the genius of my great master, Colonel Clive, of whom he had spoken to an approving House as a "heaven-born general." Indeed, this ready recognition of merit in others seemed one of the instincts of greatness, and one possessed in an eminent degree by Pitt. Nor did he wait till a brilliant success had revealed the power that achieved it. In Wolfe he had already discerned the latent spark of heroism which was to burst into so grand a fire by-and-by at Quebec.

I left the tavern as the day was closing in, and walked westward again, moved only by the roving instinct of a stranger to the town, to whom its commonest sights are new and wonderful



The lamp-lighters were mounting their ladders and filling the lamps from their oil-cans as I walked up Holborn Hill, jostled on every side by that eager, pushing throng of citizens, so different from the lounging populace of Muxadavad. Instead of the cry of the priests calling the faithful to prayers, I heard the shrill clamour of orange-girls, and small catchpenny traders offering their strange varieties of merchandise, to the utter hindrance and obstruction of all traffic. Instead of picturesque groups of turbaned Moors squatting in the Bengal sunshine, I saw a throng so diverse in dress and appearance that I might have fancied myself amidst a concourse of people from all the ends of the earth.

At one point the crowd bearing towards St. Sepulchre's Church was so dense that I was fairly brought to a standstill, and while waiting for the rabble to pass, inquired of a neighbour where all these people were going.

"I suppose they are going to see the execution to-morrow," my neighbour answered civilly.

"An execution?"

"Yes; three brothers—mere lads—who are to be hung at eight to-morrow morning."

"And it is now six in the evening. Do you mean to tell me that this rabble will wait for fourteen hours, standing in an open street, for the brief delight of seeing three of their fellow-creatures hung?"

"Not only this rabble, sir, but the finest gentlemen in the town. There is not a window within view of the gallows where you will not see a group of bloods, drinking and gaming. 'Tis said that Mr. Selwyn, the wit, has a suit of black on purpose for executions."

"And pray, sir, what is the crime of these unfortunates? Is it murder, arson, or forgery for which they are to suffer?"

"No, sir; the lads are somewhat to be commiserated. Their sole offence is the appropriation of three oak-saplings, which they severally cut and converted into walking-sticks while enjoying a sabbath ramble in a copse at Edgeware. The law for the protection of timber is somewhat stringent."

I had seen something of the severity of English laws before I was sent to India, but this formal sacrifice of three young lives for as many oak-saplings seemed to me more appalling than the cruelties of Suraja Doulah, which were at least the blind impulses of passion.

"Yes," said my neighbour, perceiving my concern, "it is really a sad case, for the lads are of respectable parentage—the sons of a small yeoman—and had no idea they were committing a felony."

"It is of a piece with the rest I hear of this country, sir," I replied. "We frame laws that would have revolted Draco himself by their cruelty, and then regret their application. It was

but last year that a body of English officers were compelled to condemn a brave man to an ignominious death, not because they thought him unworthy to live, but because the act of parliament that provided against his offence left them no alternative."

"Nay, sir," replied my neighbour; "Admiral Byng was the scape-goat of a party—a sacrifice to public disappointment. He could never have been so sacrificed if his judges had not been bound by the letter of a cruel law. They condemned him to death in obedience to an act of parliament, and recommended that he should be spared in deference to the common instincts of humanity. Is this right, sir? Should not law and humanity go hand in hand? Byng would have been pardoned, I doubt not, sir, had not His Majesty given his promise to the City that he would allow proceedings to take their course. He would fain have saved the Admiral, but was bound hand and foot by that pledge.

"What! sir," I cried, "could a Christian King mortgage his divinely prerogative—the right to be merciful?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders in an evasive manner, as who should say, "Really, sir, this is no affair of ours;" and the mob having by this time passed us, we bowed and parted.

I was glad to turn from the bustle of Holborn into the quiet of Lincoln's Inn Fields, whence I rambled on to Great Queen Street, and thence to Long Acre, staring about me as I went along with all the curiosity of a country bumpkin who surveys the town for the first time. It was but the random impulse of an idler that took me to this locality, yet no sooner was I there than it occurred to me this was a place which of all others I should visit.

It was here the milliner resided to whom Lady Barbara had desired me to address my letter—a woman of whom she had spoken as a "good soul," who might be trusted. She would scarce have said this of a person she was but little familiar with. I knew the intimacy that must of necessity obtain between a fine lady and her milliner, since the despotic changes and caprices of fashion must oblige a frequent intercourse, and it suddenly struck me that from this woman I might learn some details of the last year of Lady Barbara's life.

"I can at least call upon her," I said to myself. "If the visit prove useless, I would take much more trouble than that for the chance of hearing the smallest tidings of that dear friend."

I looked for the house, and after some time discovered a painted and gilded doll hanging over a doorway, and on the door below this sign an announcement to the effect that Mrs. Winbolt, mantua-maker and milliner to Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, had correspondents at Paris and Vienna, and might be relied on for the newest modes in court-robes, sacs, cardinals, petticoats, and mantuas.

I rang the bell, and was speedily admitted by a grinning black boy, who ushered me into a small oak-parlour at the back

of the house, where he set a candle upon the table and left me without a word. There was a half-open door between this and another apartment, whence I heard the animated tones of a female voice.

"Nay, indeed, madam, 'tis the very same material I sold but last Thursday week to the Princess of Wales. She said, 'I will have that, or nothing. I protest there's no living without a sac of Lyons brocade these days.' And for your complexion, ma'am, which is, I need scarce say, far superior to Her Royal Highness's —"

"But the price," remonstrated another voice; "I had thought six guineas would have bought the finest sac you could make me, and for one of this material you have the conscience to ask ten."

"Her Royal Highness paid twenty guineas for the same stuff, ma'am, and found her own point. With a tucker of English lace I could not do it for sixpence less than eleven guineas, and then 'tis because I would not disoblige a customer."

"I am vastly afraid your obligingness will end in my ruin," replied the customer with a profound sigh, and then followed a little more haggling, which resulted in an order for the garment under discussion. This conquest achieved on the part of the mantua-maker, and the lady shown to the door, the black boy condescended to inform his mistress of my presence, and she came bustling in upon me.

"Upon my word, sir, I know not how to apologize," she exclaimed; "that Pompey is the most incorrigible rascal; and if he had not been given me by a lady of quality, who, I make no doubt, was heartily tired of his impish tricks, I should have turned him out of my house long ago."

I was pleased with the appearance of Mrs. Winbolt, who was that kind of person usually described as "a good motherly soul." She displayed that comfortable bulk of figure which is generally supposed to accompany an easy disposition, and her complexion was as fresh as if she had been the rustic wife of some prosperous farmer.

This matronly person saluted me with a profound curtsy, and then, as she approached nearer to me, stopped suddenly short, and regarded me with a closer scrutiny than the occasion warranted. For the moment some peculiarity in my appearance seemed fairly to bewilder her; she gave a little gasp, and then began to apologize for having stared at me with apparent rudeness.

"I trust you'll be so obliging as to pardon me, sir," she said; "but I never saw a more startling likeness—but for the darkness of your complexion it would be perfect—and for the moment I was so foolish as to take you for a gentleman who has been dead these five-and-twenty years."

"You took me for my father, Mr. Roderick Ainsleigh," I said.

"Good heavens, sir! are you Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, the gentleman that was sent to India?"

"I am that ill-used person."

Mrs. Winbolt offered me both her plump hands, and shook mine with a heartiness that almost took me aback.

"Oh! sir, you must be so good as to excuse the liberty, but I couldn't be better pleased than I am to see you,—unless, indeed, Lady Barbara had lived to see this day. Alas, sir, what a loss!"

She wiped some tears from her eyes with an unobtrusive gesture.

"To me an irreparable one. 'Twas the merest hazard that brought me here; but I am very glad I came. It seems you loved my benefactress. She was something more to you than an ordinary customer?"

"Something more than a customer? Yes, sir, indeed, she was *my* benefactress; it was her blessed nature to shower favours on all she knew. I was born on the Hauteville estate, sir. Yes, I'm a Berkshire woman; and folks tell me I keep my country looks, though I've had nigh thirty years' hard work in London. My father was a tenant-farmer in a small way; and I used to go to the Hall sometimes to assist with the needlework when Martha Peyton had more on her hands than she could get through; and my Lady Barbara used to see me, and talk to me. And in those days—well, sir, I'm getting an old woman, and may speak without vanity—I was accounted something of a beauty. My good looks brought me nothing but trouble, however, for there was a young squire—Mr. Langdon of Langdon Hill—lived within ten miles of my old home, and was always riding over to our place, and talking fine poetical stuff to me; and I was a weak foolish girl, sir, and thought he was honest, and meant well by me. Other folks didn't think so, and their talk got to Lady Barbara's ears, and she came to me and told me what was said, and bade me, as I loved my own soul, see Mr. Langdon no more, unless he declared himself willing to make me his wife. 'If he loves you honestly, Susan,' the dear lady said, 'he will love you all the better for that honest question.' And I obeyed her, Mr. Ainsleigh; though it was a hard thing for a poor country girl to ask such a question; and I read my answer in my gentleman's face, though he turned it off with a careless jest, and said 'twas early times to talk of matrimony, which was apt to be the death of love; and then muttered something about country wenches being now as cautious and mercenary as any fine lady in the town. I went to my Lady Barbara that night and told her what he had said; and I was such a foolish creature in those days that I was half heart-broken to think that my suitor could be so base. My lady saw how great a trouble it was to me, and she set to work at once to

get me away from a home where I was miserable and in danger. So, as I had shown a kind of talent for mantua-making, my lady persuaded my father to send me to London, and she herself paid the money to apprentice me to a court-milliner and mantua-maker; and I came, and in a few years set up in business in a small way for myself. My lady gave me her custom, and I made all her clothes when she married Sir Marcus Lestranger, and that was the making of me; and here I am. Heaven only knows what I might have been without my lady's kindness; for my father was an easy-going man, given to drink, and looked sharper after his pigs than he did after his children. And now, sir, that's a long story; but I've been obliged to tell you as much in order that you may understand what reason I had to love Lady Barbara Lestranger."

"And you knew my father?"

"Yes, sir, I have seen him many a time, when I was working in my lady's dressing-room at the Hall. I helped with a tapestry screen that Lady Barbara was doing, you see, sir; and Martha Peyton and I used to sit at work with my lady herself, and your father used to come into the room and stand over my lady's chair, talking to her as she worked. It was but few stitches she used to set at those times. Ah, sir, there were two hearts broken when your father left Hauteville; for I am sure he loved my lady as truly as she loved him. And she loved you as well as if you had been her own son, sir. I have heard her say so; for she would tell me her troubles, when she would tell them to no one else."

"Put me out of misery by answering one question, if you have power to do so!" I exclaimed eagerly. "Did Lady Barbara believe me the wretch I must have seemed when I disappeared from London?"

"No, sir, she would believe no ill of you. She came to me within a few days of your marriage. Sir Marcus had shown her the certificate; but she declared it was a false one, and believed that some evil had befallen you. 'I will swear he loves Miss Hemsley,' she said to me; 'and this paper has been forged to do him mischief. What motive had he to marry that wretched girl? But from a marriage with Dora he had everything to gain. Oh! there is some odious treachery at work, and the same hidden enemy who caused him to be driven from Hauteville has been since working to destroy him.'"

"And Miss Hemsley—did she believe me false?"

"Alas! yes, sir; that young lady did believe the story of your marriage, and upbraided herself for having stooped to let you know she had loved you. My lady was sorely grieved by this; yet you can scarce wonder it was so, for all things told against you—above all, your disappearance. You were advertised for in the *Flying Post*, and many times, at my lady's

bidding; and one day she came to me in much distress of mind. 'He is dead, I fear!' she exclaimed. 'Were he living, I am sure he would have answered those advertisements.' I told her perchance you were kept out of the way by force, as I knew what things are done in this town: this she seemed to think probable."

"Did she suspect Everard Lestrangle as my hidden enemy?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure of it, though she never spoke his name. 'He has one bitter enemy,' she said; 'my poor boy has one unscrupulous, relentless foe.' And then she told me how she had been to Mr. Swinfen, the gentleman to whom she recommended you, but could get no tidings of you there, or at your chambers, save that you had gone out one day never to return. And so things went on; I seeing a good deal of my dear lady, who had none about her that she cared to trust. There was a French maid of Miss Hemsley's, whom I always took for a spy, for she was ever watching and listening when I waited on my lady."

"Ay, she was the veriest viper," I cried; and thereupon told the mantua-maker Ma'amselle Adolphine's share in my undoing.

"I thought as much, sir. That French hussy was in the pay of Mr. Lestrangle. She used to watch me as a cat watches a mouse; yet I don't think she ever got much good from her watching. One day came your letter from the Indies; but my lady was at that time in Paris with her husband, and I was obliged to trust the letter to the post, in a cover which I myself wrote for it. Sure I am there is no reason it should miscarry; but neither that nor another that came after it reached my lady. The family only came back to town in time for Miss Hemsley's wedding. How Sir Marcus prevailed on that young lady to marry his son, I know not, but sure I am there was no love between them; but he did so work upon her that she at last consented. There was a very fine wedding, and I was employed to make the wedding-clothes, as I had been for my lady's. It was a week after the wedding that your last letter came. Lady Barbara was now in town, and I carried it to her with my own hands, and would give it into none but hers. Oh! sir, I never shall forget her face when she read how you had been treated. 'Oh, what a villain!' she cried, starting up from her chair, with the letter crushed in her hand; 'but he shall suffer for his baseness; suffer in that kind of loss which alone can touch his sordid soul.' 'Twas this she said, or words very near to this; for there are some scenes that take a hold upon one's memory, you see, sir, and it would not be easy for me to forget this. And then she told me what had happened to you. 'He shall come back triumphant,' she said; 'yes, I will have him brought back to confront that scoundrel;' and then she sighed and exclaimed, 'Alas, poor Dora! what a fate for thee! and my arm could not shield thy helplessness!' and so she went on, in a wild rando way, as if she had been alone. Next day she came

to my house in her chair, and told me she wished to draw up a paper, upon some business matter, and did not care to do it at home. 'One might as well live upon the stage of Covent Garden Theatre as in a fine house full of servants,' she said; and I knew but too well she was watched. And then she asked me if I knew of any decent lawyer who could write out the paper she wanted. So I sent for old Mr. Solly, a respectable attorney in King Street, who had drawn up the lease of this house for me, and sometimes sued a customer for me that hung back from paying. He came immediately; and my lady and he were shut in this very parlour for nigh upon an hour, at the end of which time Mr. Solly opened the door and called me. 'I want you to witness Lady Barbara Lestrangle's signature to this paper, Mrs. Winbolt,' he said; 'there is no occasion for you to know what the paper contains; you have only to attest my lady's signature.' On this my lady signed the paper, and then laid her hand upon it and said this was her will and testament. I signed after her, and Mr. Solly put his name below mine."

"Can I see this Mr. Solly?" I asked eagerly, for I shrewdly suspected that my own interests were involved in this paper.

"Alas! no, sir, he lies in the burying-ground by Drury Lane. He was near seventy years of age, and was carried off by a fever last midsummer twelvemonth."

"Has he left any son or successor likely to be familiar with his business?"

"No, sir; he was an old bachelor. The business passed to a stranger, Mr. Compit."

Hopeless as it might seem, to think of obtaining information from such a source, I resolved to see Mr. Compit next morning. But, before bidding my kindly mantua-maker good-night, I had more questions to ask her.

"How long before her death did you see my benefactress?" I inquired.

"Never again, sir, after the day she signed the paper; it was but three weeks after that she died. I shall never forget with what a shock the news came upon me. She had been to Hauteville for a fortnight, and came back to St. James's Square to preside at an assembly given in honour of Miss Hemsley's marriage. Her death was awfully sudden."

"Mr. Lestrangle and his bride appear to have been with her?"

"Yes, sir. 'Twas after a grand dinner given in honour of them that the sad event happened. I had the account from the housekeeper in St. James's Square. 'Twas just when the visitors had left, and my lady had gone into a little room behind the drawing-room with Mrs. Lestrangle, when she gave a sudden cry, and the blood gushed from her lips. Sir Marcus and his son both ran to her, and bells were rung and doctors sent for; my lady's own maid, that French viper, Adolphine, and the

housekeeper all came with their different nostrums; but it was all of no use; she lived but to speak a few words."

"Oh, Mrs. Winbolt," I exclaimed, "what would I not give to know those last words!"

"Ay, sir, she may perchance have spoken of you in that final moment. I know she loved you dear."

"And that wretch Adolphine was still with Mrs. Lestranger? It would seem my lady had not told of her treachery."

"No, sir, I do not think my lady told your story to Mrs. Lestranger; it would have been but to make her wretched. And I believe Lady Barbara had it in her mind to bring you home, so that you might appear suddenly, as one risen from the dead, to confound your enemy."

"God grant I may yet so appear to his confusion!" I answered.

After some further conversation of an unimportant nature, I bade Mrs. Winbolt good-night, and left Long Acre, very grateful to that Providence which had conducted me thither by what had seemed hazard.

After careful consideration of all that Mrs. Winbolt had told me, I arrived at the conviction that the document executed by Lady Barbara in the mantua-maker's parlour was a will in my favour. Was not this implied in her declaration that she would punish Everard Lestranger in the sole manner his sordid nature could feel? How more surely could she punish him than by depriving him of the wealth which he had doubtless hoped my disgrace must needs assure to him?

I went early the next morning to Mr. Compit; but that gentleman could give me no help. The transaction in which his predecessor had been engaged with Lady Barbara Lestranger was of a nature too trifling to leave any record, unless it might have been some private entry in Mr. Solly's memorandum-book; and of such personal property Mr. Compit possessed none.

"If Lady Barbara Lestranger had been a regular client of my predecessor's, it would be another matter," he told me; "but, you see, the occurrence was a mere casualty, on which Mr. Solly would scarce be likely to bestow a second thought."

"Yet the rank of the client and the peculiar circumstances of the case might surely have made some impression upon him?"

"'Tis like enough they did, but not such an impression as would embody itself in documentary evidence. Mr. Solly was not the man to communicate his sentiments in relation to a business matter; he was an excellent lawyer, and as silent as the grave. If the lady wanted secrecy, she could not have employed a better man."

This was all. I left Mr. Compit's office no better informed than when I entered it.

From thence I went to the Temple, where I was so fortunæ's



as to find Mr. Swinfen at home. He received me with much kindness, and made me relate my Indian adventures. I was surprised to discover how little was known in England of those stirring events in the East, save the names of the potentates we had been concerned with, and the battles we fought. Pitt's laudation of Clive had alone been equal to the occasion; and indeed I think this great statesman was the only man in England who perceived the grandeur of that theatre now opening for British enterprise and British valour on the far shores of the Indian Ocean.

Having satisfied Mr. Swinfen with a full account of my public adventures abroad, I proceeded to relate my strange meeting with my father; a piece of news that was most surprising to him; and after that my conversation with Mrs. Winbolt of Long Acre.

"And you think the paper drawn up by this Mr. Solly was a will in your favour?" asked Mr. Swinfen, when I had finished.

"I do, sir. The fancy may seem presumptuous, but it is founded on many small circumstances that, to my mind, make a chain of evidence almost conclusive."

"And you would insinuate that such a document has been suppressed or destroyed by Sir Everard Lestrangle?"

"That, sir, is my suspicion. I know Everard Lestrangle to be capable of any villanous act. Lady Barbara was at Hauteville a week before her death; she was not cold in her coffin when her own private apartment was broken in upon, and the cabinet where she kept her papers—not her jewels, mark you, sir; those I know to have been kept elsewhere—ransacked and destroyed by masked ruffians. A common burglary, you will say, which by a mere coincidence of time happened within twenty-four hours of the lady's death. But would burglars choose this room for their point of attack, and content themselves with rifling a Japan cabinet, when the plate-room of Hauteville is known to contain that kind of treasure which alone burglars covet?"

"Your argument is plausible," replied Mr. Swinfen thoughtfully; "but it is hard to suspect a gentleman of so vile a deed."

"Have I not suffered the vilest usage at that gentleman's hands, sir? Is there any act so base that I should hesitate to believe him capable of it? But I will not press this subject upon you; I am bent on investigating the matter in some sort, though little good can come of any discovery I may make. Lady Barbara's will is doubtless destroyed; and to prove that such a paper ever existed is perhaps a task beyond human ingenuity."

After leaving Mr. Swinfen's office, I felt that my business in London was for the time concluded. Eager as I might be for a meeting with Everard Lestrangle, I wished to make myself, as far as possible, master of his secret before meeting

him. And I was now free to revisit that spot which I had seen so often in my dreams, and to which my thoughts had ever turned with inexpressible fondness. I went straight from the Temple to the coach-office where I had alighted on first arriving in London, and booked my place for Warborough, in the Bath coach, which stopped to change horses and refresh its passengers in that small market-town

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE OLD PLACE AND THE OLD FOLK.

THE Bath coach left London at dusk, and travelled all night, much to the terror of its passengers, who regarded the passage of Hounslow Heath as a period of imminent peril. Yet I think a dark narrow road in a wooded country is infinitely more appalling than a wide open landscape, such as Hounslow or Bagshot; across which, on moonlit nights, one may see a scudding hare at half a mile's distance, and where at all times the sound of horse's hoofs travels far to warn the ear of an approaching foe. Hounslow and Bagshot have, however, the stamp of fashion; and I suppose it is as much the mode for a knight of the road to assail his prey upon these particular spots, as for a gentleman to air his long-skirted coat in the Ring.

The coach deposited me at Warborough before daybreak; and while breakfasting in the coffee-room of the "George" by a good fire, I had leisure to consider how I should approach Hauteville. I was not certain of one friend in the home of my childhood and youth, and knew not whether I should be permitted to cross the threshold of the mansion, or sit once more beside the familiar hearth of the warrener's lodge.

"Yes," I said to myself after a long debate, "it is to the instinct of my foster-mother I will trust. However she may have heard me maligned, I doubt not I shall soften her. There must be a subtle power in affection that will prove stronger than lies or treachery. Yes, I will go straight to her whose tenderness sheltered my childhood, and I know *she* will not refuse to believe the truth spoken by her foster-son."

With this resolve I set out for Hauteville, and just as the sun brightened over the landscape with the promise of a glorious day, I crossed the little rustic stile which marked the boundary of the estate, and entered Hauteville woods.

Oh, how bitter and how sweet, how new and how old, how strange and how familiar, the scene was to me! Here all seemed unchanged. On the face of Nature time had set no mark; but those who had made the place dear were dead or estranged from me, and it was with a stifled sob that I paused to look around.

The walk from Warborough to Hauteville was a long one; and I knew that before I could arrive at the warrener's lodge

honest Jack Hawker would in all probability have set out on his daily round. This was what I wanted. It was upon my foster-mother's affection I relied, and I meant to make my appeal to her alone. I had occasion to pass within sight of the house; the shattered windows looked blank and dismal as when my childish eyes had first beheld them. The same air of desolation hung over the place, and instead of that careful neatness of gardens and parterres which I remembered so well in my boyhood, there was an air of neglect and actual disorder that astonished me. I concluded that Sir Everard and Lady Le-strange came seldom to their country mansion. I turned from the scene with a sigh, and continued my journey at a quicker pace.

The blue smoke from the warrener's lodge was curling cheerily upward from among the newly-budding trees, ever so faintly tinged with a tint of tender green. Here at least there was life: here something much more like home than was to be found in yonder stately dreary pile, which Vanbrugh had improved away from its original gothic splendour. My heart beat fast as I hurried along the path which little Margery and I had so often trodden hand in hand.

Dear child! Her image came back to me, not as I had seen it in the hour of my enthrallment by a base plotter, but in the gentle innocence of childhood, fair as the face of an angel.

The outward aspect of Jack Hawker's cottage had changed in no particular since I last looked on it. The latticed windows twinkled in the morning sun, the chickens pecked invisible nourishment from the short dewy grass, and close at hand sounded the comfortable grunt of satisfied English pigs. The door was fastened only by the latch with which my hand had been of old so familiar. I paused for a minute ere I crossed the threshold, and the next moment was standing face to face with my foster-mother.

She had just emerged from the dairy, carrying a dish of butter. This she set down hastily, startled by the entrance of one she took for a stranger. I was standing with my back to the light, and my seven years' apprenticeship under an Indian sky had doubtless wrought some change in me. However slight this change may have been, my foster-mother took me for a foreign pedlar.

"Nay, sir," she said, with a furtive glance of apprehension towards a certain walnut-wood box, in which I had of old known her to keep the family treasure of plate—six teaspoons, a battered candle-cup, and a monstrous silver watch—"I am but a hard-working countrywoman, that never wore lace in her life, and have no need of your smuggled foreign stuffs. At the great house you might find a customer, were my lady at home; but she has not been there this year past, nor is likely to be there for as long to come."

"What! Mrs. Hawker," I said reproachfully, "your eyes are bright enough yet, but it seems to me they will not help your memory to recall an old friend."

She looked at me for a moment, and then clapped her hands together with a shrill cry.

"Why, Robin," she exclaimed, "how brown thou art grown!"

"Mother," I said, "I left this place an outcast. Did you believe me guilty of that foul wrong for which Sir Marcus drove me out?"

She hung her head as she answered me,—

"Yes, Robin, at first I half-inclined to think my darling's ruin must needs be your work; I knew she loved you. How he lured her from her home I know not to this hour; but I have long known it was no act of yours."

"Yet whence should come my justification, mother, if not from your own heart?"

"It came from hers. A year after she left us, there came a woman to me one morning, while my husband was in the woods, to say I was to call next day—market-day—at the 'George,' at Warborough, where there was one who wanted to see me. It was not strange that I guessed at once 'twas something to do with Margery, for my lost child was never out of my thoughts. I questioned the woman, but she would tell me nothing. I was to go to the 'George,' and ask for the person who wished to see Mrs. Hawker. This was all. Oh, Robin, thou art a man, and knowest not what a mother's heart can suffer! I thought the time would never pass. I lay awake all night, praying that I might hear of my child; and next day, setting out on the journey, I felt like one distraught. The house was scarce up when I went to the 'George,' and I had to wait a chambermaid's leisure before I was taken upstairs to a sitting-room, where the shutters were still shut. While the woman was opening them, a figure wrapped in a white gown came out of a room adjoining. 'O God, it is my child!' I cried; and the words were scarce spoken when Margery was sobbing in my arms. I stayed with her all day, Robin. There was no stall of mine set in the market that day, and I had to sell my butter and honey, at a dead loss, to a chapwoman in the town. We were together all day, my child and I; but she would tell me scarce anything, save that we had done thee wrong, and that an enemy had hatched a wicked plot to bring about thy ruin. "'Twas no act or word of his that tempted me from my home, mother,' she said. Yet when I pressed her to tell the villain's name she would not. 'You must ask me no questions, mother, as you love me,' she said. 'I was mad to trust myself here, but I could not live a day longer without seeing you. I am rich enough to go where I please.' And she swore there was no shame in the money, Robin; it was all won by

her own honest labour. She lived alone, with but few friends, and had neither lover nor suitor. She had sinned, and suffered and repented: those were her very words, Robin. I begged her hard to tell me where she lived, and how; but she would no. 'I am lost in the great wilderness of London, mother,' she said; 'but there is not an hour in which I sit alone that my thoughts do not fly back to my old home and hover around those I love. Would they were guardian spirits to protect and shelter you!' She pressed money upon me, but that I refused; and it was but to stop her tears that I consented to take a locket from her neck."

"And have you never seen her since, mother?"

"Yes, Robin, often. The same woman brings me her message, and we meet in the same room three or four times in the year, and I know my child loves me. Yet I dare not speak her name to her father, unless I could tell him she was coming home to us; and that she will not do. And so we go on, Robin. I know nothing of my child except that she loves me."

"And you have never been to London to look for her?"

My foster-mother regarded me with a wondering smile. It was as if I had asked her whether she had been to Hindostan.

"I was never in London in my life, Robin, nor my husband either, and I know not a creature in that great city."

"Shall I search for Margery?" I asked.

"Ah, Robin, if thou wouldst!" cried she, clasping her hands.

"Who has a better right than I? Did I not ever love her as a brother should love his sister? She was made the unconscious instrument in a vile plot against me; but that is cleared up now, and there is no cloud between us. I will seek her, mother; and, if it is possible, I who was accused of luring her away, will bring her back to you."

And now I entreated my foster-mother to tell me all she knew of that strange event which had happened at the Hall on the night after Lady Barbara's death, and how it had fared with my old friend Anthony Grimshaw since that time.

"Alas, poor soul!" she exclaimed, "he lives, and that is all can be said. His poor wits have gone for ever, the doctor says; and yet there are times when he knows people, and for a few minutes together will be quite rational. I doubt he might mend if he lived a different life, amongst cheerful sights and sounds, and with people that would talk to him; but to be mewed up for ever with Martha Grimshaw is enough to drive sane folks mad."

"Faith, I have reason to know that. Mrs. Grimshaw is the very genius of gloom; and these last seven years have not improved her, I suppose?"

"Nay, Robin; she has changed for the worse since you left; yet she goes more than ever to the chapel in Brewer's Yard. not often I go to the great house, but I never see her that

she does not sigh and groan as if a corpse were in the next chamber."

"Poor Tony!"

"Ay, poor soul! 'tis a dreary life for him. He sits moping by the fire; and were it not for the comfort of his pipe, I doubt he would have been dead long ago. 'Tis his sole companion and friend."

"Were the scoundrels who made the attack ever brought to justice?" I asked.

"No, Robin; they were never so much as seen in the county."

"And they were known for no foul work before or after?"

"Never that Jack or I could hear of. No men answering to the description have been caught by the thief-takers since that time."

"Were no means taken to discover the wretches?"

"Sir Marcus sent two men down from London—one, an ugly fellow, that they said was as clever at hunting a thief to the gallows as one Jonathan Wild that had taught him the trade; but the men could make nothing of the business."

"And after this no more was done?"

"What more could be done? Squire Hedges, one of the county magistrates, was set upon catching the scoundrels, and there was not a tramp or a vagabond brought before him that he did not suspect as concerned in the Hauteville burglary; but nothing came of his pains."

This was all my foster-mother could tell me, and it only helped to confirm my suspicions of foul play. I was determined to see Anthony Grimshaw and his wife before going back to London; so I bade the dear soul good-bye, promising to see her again before many months.

"I shall go back to London by to-night's coach," I said. "I have no purpose in Berkshire but to see you and poor old Anthony."

Before leaving, I asked her one more question. Had she told my foster-father how cruelly he had wronged me?

"Alas! no, Robin," she answered, hanging her head. "For two reasons I dared not tell him that: first, because I must have owned to having seen the child; and next, because to tell him as much would have been to set him looking for the wretch that really did the mischief. If my good man suspected Sir Everard Lestrange was the scoundrel—I think he is, Robin—he would not sleep another night under this roof; and I love my home, dear. My child was born in this house. It would be a kind of death to leave it. And, after all, we know not for certain that it was Sir Everard stole our girl away from us."

I could but smile sadly at the woman's reasoning. She was the fondest, tenderest creature I had ever known; yet the finer sense of honour, which the rugged man had, was wanting in the softer woman.

"Tell my foster-father nothing till I bring his daughter home to him with a name which is honestly hers," I said, and left the cottage without waiting to be questioned.

I reflected that, as the widow of Mr. Hay, a soldier slain in Bengal, my foster-sister might return to her home without shame or scandal. It must needs be easy enough to prove a marriage performed no more than seven years ago; and I resolved to visit Paris myself, in order to obtain due evidence of the fact. It was only by making this first marriage a certainty, that I could assure myself from the hazard of any legal entanglement arising out of the second.

Grimly dreary—splendid as it had seemed to me when I first entered it—appeared Hauteville Hall on this the occasion of my revisiting it after a lapse of years. A strange maid-servant admitted me at a small iron-clamped door that had been used by the Grimshaws and myself during the long absence of the family. I was conducted across the great hall—where the banners looked dingier and more ragged than of old to eyes that had so lately beheld the blaze of Indian standards beneath an Indian sun—along the same passages by which I had first reached Mrs. Grimshaw's dreary sanctum, and so to the door of the sanctum itself, which the woman opened softly and admitted me.

"A gentleman from London to speak with Mrs. Grimshaw on business," she solemnly announced in my own words, and retired, closing the door behind her, leaving me face to face with my old enemy, who dropped the book she had been reading, and started up from her chair, staring at me with a ghastly face.

My tutor was dozing in an arm-chair close to the fire, with a handkerchief over his face. My heart yearned to this kind friend in his affliction, and it was to him I should at once have addressed myself, had not his wife's awful looks arrested me by a kind of magnetic power.

"Robert Ainsleigh!" she cried.

"Yes, madam," I answered, "and I am pleased that you at last deign to call me by my right name. During my absence from this place I have met one who was witness to my mother's wedding, and am thus able to tell you I never deserved that opprobrious title you were wont to bestow upon me."

"Indeed, sir; I am glad to hear Miss Lester was not the base creature folks believed her when she ran away from her home to take up with your father."

"It is the misfortune of the generous and impulsive to invite the censure of the malevolent, madam," I replied. "My mother has passed to a world where her actions will happily meet a more tender judgment than they received on earth."

"May I ask what business brings you to Sir Everard Lestrangle's house after these many years? I was not aware

that you and he were on terms of friendship, however you may stand with his lady."

This was said with a little spiteful shiver. The woman had an inordinate capacity for hatred, and her manner told me that even gentle Dorothea was not exempt from her ill-will.

"I come to see a very old friend, Mrs. Grimshaw," I replied; "one for whose kindness I had reason to be grateful at a period when I had sore need of friendship."

"My husband is in no condition to profit by your civility sir," replied the pitiless creature; "he knows no one—not even his wife."

"It will be a melancholy satisfaction to me to see him, notwithstanding, madam; and with your leave I will wait till Mr. Grimshaw awakens."

I seated myself without invitation, and Mrs. Grimshaw resumed her lecture. A glance at the cover of the pamphlet in her hand showed me that it was one of George Whitefield's innumerable sermons.

"And that woman will account herself justified by faith," I said to myself, "as if she, who has not one Christian thought or impulse, can with the heart acknowledge Christ. O miserable lip-service!"

For about a quarter of an hour we sat in silence—a silence broken only by the low ticking of the eight-day clock, the heavy breathing of the sleeper, and the falling of the light wood ashes on the hearth. The fire was the only comfortable thing in the room.

The striking of the clock awoke my old friend. He pushed the handkerchief from his face with a tremulous hand, and looked around him like a child that is newly awakened. Great Heaven, how changed was that wan white face from the intelligent countenance I had known so well! It was like a mask moulded from the dead, rather than the visage of the living.

"My pipe, mother," he said, stretching his hand towards his wife without looking at her.

Mrs. Grimshaw filled a clay pipe that lay beside a jar of tobacco on a table near the old man's chair, and handed it to him, assisting him submissively while he lighted it.

"It is but in such vile creature-comforts the benighted soul can find pleasure," she said, by way of commentary on this small act of charity. "The bread of life hath no power to nourish or console him. It is in vain that I read the inspired pages of Mr. Whitefield, or the learned discourses of the late holy Venn. He doth but stare at me with a blank unmeaning gaze. And you will have observed that he calls me 'mother.' He has by some strange hazard forgotten his later life, and takes me for his mother, who departed to the rest of the pious high forty years ago. The mind is quite gone, you see, Mr. Ainsleigh."



No, not quite. At the sound of that familiar name there came a faint flicker of the lamp which Mrs. Grimshaw thought to be for ever extinguished.

"Ainsleigh," muttered the old steward, "Ainsleigh! Roderick Ainsleigh—a wayward lad—proud, but generous; and I think he loved me. Yes, I am sure he loved me. Poor lad! Dead, they tell me. Yet who should be master of Hauteville, if not he? There is no one else; I say there is no one else."

It seemed as if these broken sentences struck terror to the mind of Martha Grimshaw. She hastened to the old man, and did her best to stop his talking.

"'Tis your coming has sent him into this fever," she cried angrily; "he is not fit to be seen by strangers, and cannot bear to see them."

"Strangers! yes, madam, he may be loth to see strangers; but I am no stranger. I am one who loves him—one whom, I dare venture to say, he loved.—Come, dear sir," I said, going to my old friend and kneeling down beside his chair, sorely against the will of his wife, who lacked only the strength to keep me off by main force, and wanted not the will to be violent; "come, sir, look at one who has ever loved you; your friend, your pupil—not Roderick, but Robert Ainsleigh!"

The old steward gazed upon me with a fixed countenance, but the transient gleam of intelligence that had lighted it a few moments before was gone; it was a blank.

"Dear sir, do you not remember me?"

"Is it likely he should remember you, when he does not know his own wife?" Mrs. Grimshaw demanded with a sneer.

I was still kneeling at my old friend's feet, gazing curiously into his face, with his cold wasted hand clasped in mine. Alas, I could neither warm that feeble hand into the genial glow of health, nor awaken one thrill of memory in that frozen brain!

While I thus watched him, the old man suddenly rose from his chair and tottered with feeble steps towards the door.

"Come, come," he said in a confidential whisper; "I promised—come, all is safe. I promised to take care. An old man, my lady, but a faithful servant. Come."

He beckoned to his wife, and then laid his hand, as if mechanically, upon my arm, and drew me, by no means unwillingly, along with him. In this manner we left the room, and walked along the narrow passage, and through the deserted chambers in which I had lived in the brief period of my gentility. Heavens, how ghastly they looked! with all their splendour shrouded by holland draperies, and only a glimpse of the chill March sunlight creeping in here and there through a hole in a shutter. Mrs. Grimshaw followed us closely, with a countenance that expressed at once impatience, anger, fear, contempt—a very conflict of passions.

My old tutor led me to the foot of the grand staircase and upward to a room that I remembered with a pang of unspeakable bitterness, a tenderness that was anguish—that last worst agony the Italian tells of in his catalogue of hell's various tortures—the memory of departed happiness. It was my Lady Barbara's morning-room before the door of which my tutor stopped.

"It is a madness with him to come to this room, where he met with the accident that lost him his wits," said Mrs. Grimshaw; "he will come here every day, sometimes twice a day. The Lord has been pleased to afflict him grievously in punishment of his sins."

"Nay, madam, I doubt if it were a question of punishment for sin, my old friend might have kept his wits till others I know of had lost theirs. I do not believe in that nice scale of earthly reward and punishment, that debtor-and-creditor account with the Almighty, which some folks pretend to keep. It has pleased God to afflict a good and harmless old man in this instance, as He hath often chastised the innocent in days gone by, for some wise purpose of his own."

Mr. Grimshaw rattled the handle of the door impatiently.

"Open, open!" he cried; and his wife, with a most unwilling air, took a key from her pocket and unlocked the door.

"It is but to encourage his madness to let him come here," she said; "and you, sir, who can have no business here, and whose presence in this house would, I am sure, be displeasing to my master, Sir Everard Lestrangle, will oblige me by leaving me alone with my husband. It can be no pleasure to me that he should exhibit his infirmities to curious eyes, and I know not at whose invitation you came hither."

"At no invitation, Mrs. Grimshaw. I come to a house in which I have been grievously wronged." My looks were fixed on her countenance as I said this, and I saw her blench. "And I come chiefly to see this one old friend; secondly, because I believe this house hides the secret of a great wrong done to me."

At this her countenance grew livid, and from this moment I was sure that whatever evil had been done in my absence, this harridan was in the secret of it. For the minute my random words had a crushing effect upon her, and she made no further attempt to prevent my entrance into the chamber where I first heard the story of my birth, seated at the feet of my benefactors. The room had a disused air, and, except in the one instance of the ebony cabinet, which had disappeared from a recess by the fireplace, there was nothing changed since I had last beheld the apartment. I was very curious to see what purpose, or what fragmentary memory of some past duty, had brought my tutor to this room, and I stood apart observing him in silence.

He walked slowly round the room, looking at every article of furniture with an inquiring gaze, as if he would have demanded

of each inanimate object what it was that he sought. Sometimes he came to a dead stop, shaking his head with a strange hapless gesture; then with a faint sigh walked on, and thus completed his round.

"Something missing," he muttered at last. "An old man, my lady, but a faithful servant. Yet there is something missing. What, what, what, what?"

No words can describe the piteousness of his tone as he reiterated this last monosyllable.

"It must be the Indian cabinet he misses!" I exclaimed.

"Likely enough," replied Mrs. Grimshaw, with a carelessness which I felt sure was but assumed. "He had a childish fancy for taking charge of this room—the odds and ends of old china, and books, and such-like; and the thought of it worries him now his poor wits have gone."

"There must surely have been something of peculiar importance in this room," said I; "my old friend was too sensible to perform a duty that might have been better discharge by a housemaid. He must have had some solemn charge in this room, or the broken memory would scarce prey upon his mind as it does."

I watched Mrs. Grimshaw as I spoke, and I saw that every word was a homethrust. Yes, there had been a plot, and the outrage committed in this room was a part of it. It had been a plot against me, and this woman was concerned in it, or privy to it. But what advantage was it to me to know this? and what more than this was I ever likely to discover?

"'Twas strange that nothing was ever heard of the villains who misused your husband, madam," I said.

"Yes, sir, it was very strange."

"Did his master, Sir Marcus, take no pains to avenge so faithful a servant?"

"Sir Marcus did his duty to my husband, sir. All was done that could be done."

"And who were the doctors that preserved my old friend's life, and yet failed to restore his reason?"

"My husband had the attendance of two doctors, sir; Mr. Harris of Rerton Green, and Mr. Claypole of Warborough."

"What! two country surgeons only? Were no eminent men brought down from London to pronounce upon his state?"

"He had every care, sir, and constant prayers. Mr. Whitefield himself prayed for him by name during a blessed visit to Warborough."

"And these prayers were to avail instead of medical science! Why, woman, this is a kind of murder, to let the lamp of reason go out for want of a judicious breath to coax back the flame."

"I cannot argue with a blasphemer, sir! Elisha went up into his chamber, where the child of the Shunammite woman lay dead and 'shut the door upon them twain and prayed unto the Lord.'"

"Elisha lived in the childhood of this earth, when man was still an infant at the knees of his Creator. The age of miracles is past, and, instead of His own divine interposition, the Almighty has given us science. He has taught us to be ourselves the miracle-workers; but you bundle away the gift in a napkin, and think to save yourself cheaply and easily by prayer."

"I do not ask your advice, sir, as to the treatment of my husband, and I am fully satisfied with what was done for him."

"Ay, madam, I doubt not it suited you that he should lose his wits. There may be secrets in this house that could scarce be kept hidden while so honest a man had his senses."

Again I saw that every word went home. And now, having little more motive for remaining in this house, since my old friend gave me no token of recognition, I wished Mrs. Grimshaw good-day, and left her, I felt sure, furious and bewildered, not knowing how much, and certainly in nowise suspecting how little, I knew of the evil doings with which she was acquainted.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.

WITHIN twenty-four hours of my interview with Mrs. Grimshaw I was again in London, a solitary stranger, with no concern but that dreary business of self-interest until such time as I could gratify man's natural desire for revenge by a meeting with Mr. Lestrangle. I called in St. James's Square immediately on my return; but the gentleman was not yet back, nor expected for above a week, so I had my time on my hands for that period. I was so fortunate as to find my old chambers in Brick Court vacant: here I once more took up my abode; and by the lonely hearth where my treacherous friend had found me, I sat and brooded over the strange destinies of betrayer and betrayed. And now I became a haunter of taverns, not because I loved such places, but because I was like a foreigner in my native land, and was anxious to learn the ways of the town, and pick up any information with which strangers could furnish me about Sir Everard Lestrangle. Of this gentleman the gay young Templars, with whom I for the most part associated, had plenty to tell me; but I knew the liveliness of their fancy, and that it needed some discrimination to distinguish fact from fiction in their narratives of the baronet's doings. Some of them affected to know him intimately, but when hard pressed, owned to merely a public knowledge of him. All agreed in declaring him distinguished among the bloods of his day by a bad eminence, and about his vices my informants were so unanimous that I could scarce doubt their veracity.

"He has a rage for actresses," said one of a somewhat reprobate party which I had joined at supper, in a comfortable but

obscure tavern close to the Temple gates, where some dozen or so of young law-students had formed a club by the name of Knights-errant.

"You had better say for an actress, Tom," answered his friend; "it is Mrs. Hunter he has followed for these last two years. His passion is the talk of the town. And they say she will not listen to his suit, though he has offered to settle a handsome income on her, and sign a bond promising to marry her within six months of his present wife's death."

"Good heavens, what iniquity!" I cried.

"Pshaw! my dear sir, since the elevation of Mr. Gay's Polly to the peerage there is a fashion for offering coronets to actresses; and shall a beggarly baronet be punctilious when a duke can put his pride in his pocket for the love of a pretty face? Why, Lady Lucretia Lovegrove ran away with an actor only the other day, and married the fellow before you could say Jack Robinson, at the very time when her friends were arranging an alliance between her ladyship and Lord Fitzpactolus, who owns half Somerset and three-quarters of Devonshire, and has half a million a year at the very least from a copper-mine in Cornwall—one of those monstrous landowners of whom it is said that England is fast becoming a heptarchy. But Mrs. Hunter is a living mystery—a virtuous actress: the rage of the town, and virtuous!"

"In spite of Sir Everard Lestrangle?"

"In spite of better men than Sir Everard Lestrangle," replied the Templar, with a rakish shrug and simper. "Why, I have been Mrs. Hunter's declared admirer myself for the last six months, and yet the citadel stands, though I will not say it has not tottered."

"And pray where is this paragon to be seen, sir?" I asked.

"On the boards of Drury Lane, sir; where her talents and her beauty have enchanted the town for the last three years. It is said Garrick picked her up in a country booth, starving on a beggarly pound a week. She is the most versatile creature in the world; when she plays the fine lady, you would swear she had been born the daughter of a duke; yet she has but to dress herself as a country wench, and every word and look and gesture smells of green fields and rustic farmyards. Her Polly Peachum is an angel that has been reared among thieves; her Sir Harry Wildair is as fine as Woffington's: I have heard as much from those who remember that great actress in her prime. Pshaw! gentlemen, this sounds like a lover's fooling; but when I begin that divine creature's panegyric, I know not how to stop."

"And it is this bright creature Sir Everard has pledged himself to ruin?"

"Ay, sir; so runs the talk of the town. Some say it is a wager, and that the baronet—who, though a profligate by the

senses, is colder than ice at heart—would pursue no woman so furiously except from some great gain to himself.”

“I can believe anything of him that is mean or base,” said I; and the remark provoked no argument, for, well as the baronet was known to the assembly by reputation, no one present appeared to have heard any good of him.

I was eager to see the fair genius whose talents, or beauty, or fashion, had given her so powerful an influence over the profligate mind of my enemy; so, early on the next evening, I seated myself on one of the foremost benches in the pit of Drury Lane, having first assured myself that Mrs. Hunter had a part in the night's performance.

The play was *As You Like It*, with Mrs. Hunter in the part of Rosalind, and Mr. Garrick as the melancholy Jacques. Early as it was, the house was fast filling when I took my seat, and I found myself in the midst of a sort of critical club; a little knot of playgoers who came to the evening's entertainment as epicures come to a feast—prepared to enjoy, but still more ready to criticise.

“I wonder Garrick cares to play so insignificant a part,” said one gentleman.

“Nay, sir,” replied a ponderous person in a shabby suit of brown; “Jacques is no insignificant part. He has two of the finest orations in the whole of Shakespeare.”

“But the man has nothing to do.”

“Sir, there is no part in any play where a fine actor will not find something to do. Do you think when the Greek orator talked of action he meant only furious posturings and rushings from one end of the theatre to the other? No, sir. In that phrase Demosthenes included all those finer movements of physical nature by which a man reveals his emotion, from the hand uplifted to the gods to the faintest quiver of lip or nostril. There are characters in which any stroller can win applause; Richard the Third, for instance, whom Shakspeare made a sublime incarnation of evil, and in whose mouth Cibber has put such claptrap fustian as cannot fail to please the groundlings. But it is in such a part as Hamlet or Jacques the intellectual man can best display his powers, and I think Davy does wisely to undertake the character. They say he is furiously jealous of this Mrs. Hunter, and that he only brought her forward to mortify Kitty Clive. She has been heard to complain of his unkindness—a frivolous fault-finding spirit that would fain thwart her in every original expression of her art.”

The curtain rose upon the first scene, but I, who was chiefly eager to behold Mrs. Hunter, paid little attention to the Shakspearian dialogue. I had not long to wait, for the second scene began with the entrance of two ladies, and a loud burst of applause from all the house told me that one of these was the paragon.

She swept the ground in a low curtesy, and seemed, as she rose, to survey the whole audience with one bright look of gratitude and pleasure. She was indeed a lovely creature, and I think in every part of her exquisite form, in every feature of her radiant face, approached as near perfection as humanity can do.

Upon me those flashing eyes shone with a familiar light, those rosy lips discoursed a well-remembered music. I sat dumb-founded, staring in amazement; for this wonder and divinity of all the town was the woman with whom I had roved hand in hand beneath the oaks of Hauteville near twenty years ago. The odour of fallen leaves; the aromatic scent of pine-woods, came back to me as I looked at her. This untutored genius, whom the town had elevated into a goddess, was my foster-sister Margery!

Paralyzed by surprise, I sat through three acts of the play gazing at her, fixed as a statue, unconscious of surrounding objects as a sleep-walker. Her acting, like her beauty, seemed to me to be simple perfection. There was a freshness and innocence in her manner I have never since seen in any other actress. Every look, every action, seemed spontaneous as the singing of a bird. I think, indeed, that she had just the same delight in acting as a skylark has in his rapturous carollings when he soars into that upper heaven almost beyond our ken. For her to act was an intoxication; and once she had entered on the life of the banished duke's daughter, all the cares and memories of Mrs. Margery Hunter were blotted from the tablet of her brain, and she had neither griefs nor joys that were not Rosalind's. This she has told me long since that night; and Mr. Garrick himself has confessed that, although he found her a strolling player in a barn, beyond the rudiments and veriest mechanism of her art he has never been able to teach her anything. All the rest was natural to her, and this great man was quick to recognize in her a genius as perfect and innate as his own.

The third act was finished before I stirred from my seat. I had seen Mistress Rosalind in her boyish dress, which was all that womanly coquetry could invent for man's bewitchment, and yet in no smallest detail sinned against feminine modesty. At last I roused myself by an effort from the spell which surprise had cast upon me, and made my way out of the theatre amid all the bustle of a full house, noisy with the bawling of orange-girls and the chatter of the audience, who were pleased to find their tongues at liberty, and made good use of the interval between the acts of the play.

Outside the house I inquired my way to the stage-door, and here I asked if it would be possible for an old friend to obtain speech with Mrs. Hunter before she left the theatre.

"Not till the play is done, were you her nearest relation," answered the man in charge of the players' entrance; "for Mrs. Hunter will speak to no one while she is acting. But she some-

times receives company in her dressing-room before leaving the theatre, and if you will tell me your name, I will let her woman know that you desire to see her."

"It would be better for me to write a note," I said, "if you can give me pen, ink, and paper."

This the man was unable to do, so great was the bustle and confusion of people hurrying in and out, and I wondered to discover how many unseen workers were necessary to the production of a play. Finding the man unable to assist me, I ran across to a tavern on the other side of the street, where I wrote a few hasty lines to my foster-sister, entreating her to see me after the play. This I gave to the man, with a crown-piece, and he promised it should be delivered immediately.

I was assured he had kept his promise when Mrs. Hunter came on the stage in the scene that followed my return to the house, for there was a startled look on her face, and she gazed around the auditory in a way she had not done before. For the moment she had ceased to be Rosalind, and was occupied with her own emotions. I was not able to regain my old place among the critics in the centre of the pit, and could get only standing-room in a corner, where I found myself close against a stage-box.

While I was gazing at the fair creature on the stage, who, I doubted not, was looking for me among the spectators, a voice sounded close at hand that sent a shot through me. It was the voice of my enemy, and it came from the stage-box.

"Who is Mrs. Hunter looking for to-night?" cried Sir Everard Lestrangle; "I thought she always minded her book, and she tripped twice in that last speech. Who is there in the house to attract the lady's brown eyes? There sits Horry Walpole grinning at the audience. What a dried anatomy it is! He has begun patching-up some gothic monstrosity at Twit'nam, and is trying to twist a very decent cottage, in which a man might live, into a compound of Westminster Abbey and his Castle of Otranto, which is only fit for a scene in a pantomime. And he leads that wretched Richard Bentley the life of a dog, collecting marbles and pictures for him, which, when collected, rarely please his virtuosoship either in price or in quality, for he is as mean as he is critical. Is that Chesterfield yonder? Good heavens, how old the man is getting! He must be close upon seventy, and is growing deaf, I hear, into the bargain. That sort of spectacle should be kept at home, wrapped in flannels and fed with gruel; it is a reminder as unpleasant as the skull at the Egyptians' feasts. Gad, Vernon, is she not lovely? Had Diana a more perfect form, or Venus a diviner face?"

This outburst of rapture and the remarks that had preceded it were spoken in that languid courtly voice which Everard



Lestrangle had always adopted, and were too low to offend the audience. The curtain presently fell on the fourth act, and I had leisure to observe the gentleman with whom I was so eager for a reckoning.

"I will go straight to his box," I said to myself; but then it struck me that it would be wiser first to see my foster-sister, and hear all she could tell me about the career of her betrayer.

To find the seducer now the avowed and unsuccessful suitor of his cast-off mistress was a transformation which I should have believed impossible; and I knew not to what cause I could attribute so marvellous an effect. Was it the spirit of contradiction that had worked this miracle in a bad man's soul? Was it wounded vanity—the macaroni's base worship of fashion? I had afterwards reason to know it was a compound of these feelings, a vile amalgam of obstinacy, conceit, and the fribble's slavish deference to the world's opinion. The country-girl whom Everard Lestrangle lured from her home had soon tired so fine a gentleman; but the gifted woman whose perfections were the town-talk was a creature he languished to conquer. He had told people that she had been his mistress, and that he had wearied of her and cast her off; but unfortunately, lying on these subjects was so much the order of the day, that no one could be made to believe the truthful boaster.

The curtain once down, the gentlemen in the stage-box gave loose to their tongues; but as a fashionable profligate's conversation is of all discourses the least edifying, I will not trouble myself to record it here. I had heard enough to be sure that Sir Everard Lestrangle was a faithless husband, and that he had pursued, and intended still to pursue, my foster-sister with a resolution that had more of hate than love.

"I had her in the dust at my feet once, Vernon," he said, "and I'll have her there again, and win my wager."

"Faith, it is a wager worth winning, and will make up to you for your losses to Staindale at White's last week. Was it seven or nine thousand he won from you at a *coup*?"

"Upon my life I think it was but seven. We had been doubling our stakes since dinner, and towards supper-time the play was getting high."

These fine gentlemen were quiet enough during the last act, throughout which Sir Everard Lestrangle lolled upon the cushion of his box with folded arms, regarding Mrs. Hunter with a fixed stare that was in itself sufficient to compromise an honest woman. Though he was near enough to the stage to render his presence obvious to her, she betrayed no consciousness of his existence, but played her part with the most lively, unembarrassed air possible, speaking a very foolish epilogue with enchanting grace and *naïveté*.

No sooner had the curtain fallen than I hurried to the stage-

door, where I found the porter as eager as he had before been indifferent. I was to be pleased to go immediately to Mrs. Hunter's dressing-room, and a hanger-on of the playhouse was in readiness to conduct me thither. I followed this man with alacrity, by numerous darksome and narrow passages that smelt strongly of tallow and lamp-oil. Alas, poor Margery, under what strange circumstances had we last met and parted! I had seen her kneeling at my feet, piteous, with clasped hands beseeching my mercy, in that miserable hour of my betrayal, and had hated and spurned the innocent instrument of my undoing. Now I approached the idol of the town, a peerless brilliant creature, whom every admirer of genius must needs delight to honour.

My conductor stopped at a little door in a narrow passage, which seemed to me about on a level with the footman's gallery, opened it, and introduced me into a small chamber, where I beheld the Rosalind of the evening, dressed as she had left the stage, and seated before a toilet-table lighted with wax-candles, and carelessly bestrewn with a heterogeneous collection of combs, brushes, rouge-pots, false hair, pomanders and pouncet-boxes, powdering machines, and masks to be worn during the powdering process, ribbons, fans, laces, feathers, and trinkets of every kind. An honest-faced waiting-woman was folding a brocaded petticoat, while her mistress sat idle, with her face turned towards the door.

She sprang to her feet as I entered the room.

"Oh, Robert," she cried, "what happiness to see you again! Leave us, Molly; this gentleman is my brother; you can come back in half an hour to dress me."

The woman dropped a curtsey and vanished, leaving me face to face with the loveliest woman I ever looked upon. Yes, I say this,—I, who never loved but one woman, yet could but acknowledge the superior brilliance of this peasant-born beauty to my own pale flower. I loved Dorothea, but from this woman I could not withhold the admiration which is man's natural tribute to perfect beauty.

"My brother," repeated Margery, with both hands extended to me, as the door closed on the waiting-woman; "my brother only! oh, for pity's sake, say I am forgiven! I was but an instrument in their hands, Robert, an ignorant country-girl, who believed again and again, and consented to be deluded anew after every fresh deception. On my soul, Robert, I believed it was your wish to marry me, shameful creature as I was! He told me so, and I believed him, though he had lied to me a hundred times before."

"But were you free to marry? Had there been no previous marriage?"

"What, you know of that?" she cried, surprised.

"Of the marriage at the French embassy, yes, Margery."

"Oh, what a catalogue of infamies I must confess, if I tell you all!" she exclaimed. "He lured me from my home with the most solemn promises—yes, Robert, the most solemn pledges that I should be his wife. Nothing but that certainty would have tempted me, for I never loved him as other women love the men to whom they trust their honour. I had not the excuse that others have. I never really loved him, Robert,—and I had loved another."

This was said in a lower voice, and with infinite tenderness. Then her tone changed to one that expressed only scorn,—scorn of her betrayer, scorn of herself.

"It was my own vanity betrayed me, Robert, aided by his deceitful tongue. His artful compliments set me thinking of my own merits. He made whatever beauty God gave me for a blessing, an instrument for my destruction. He worked upon every weakness of my nature—is the devil himself so perfect in the art of temptation?—until he made me discontented with my peaceful innocent life, and eager to be a lady. And when he had fully succeeded in poisoning my mind thus, he swore, as if reluctantly, in a kind of desperate passion of love and devotion for me, that, sooner than loose me, he would seal his own ruin in the world by making me his wife. Robert, as I have a soul to be saved, I had resisted every dishonourable proposal. But when he swore this, under circumstances that would have deceived any ignorant creature like me, I believed and trusted him. David Garrick himself is no better actor. I will not pause to tell you the story of my flight. I had scarce reached London when I found myself in the hands of wretches of my own sex, and they, by arts too vile for these lips to describe, compassed my undoing; and then they and he, the arch-deceiver, told me to be happy. They swore there was scarce a lady of quality in the town more honest than I, and asked, derisively, if I wanted to be more innocent than my betters. Mr. Lestrangle took me to France, and gave me the seducer's common recompense to his victim, in the shape of trinkets and fine clothes, masquerades and suppers. I was introduced into a world as wicked—I dare venture to declare—as that on which Heaven rained fire and brimstone; and when I was bold enough to declare my hatred of this garish hell, my master told me I was no mate for a gentleman. Whatever charm he had once seen in me was washed from my face by repentant tears, and he wearied of me in less than a month, then tried to sell me to an elderly libertine of his acquaintance—it was the custom of the country, he said—and finding his slave rebellious, told me I must go back to the home I had abandoned, and that as a reward my folly and peevishness had ill deserved, I should return thither an honest woman, the wife of his led-captain. The marriage was to be only a form. Mr. Hay wanted no wife, but was willing to sell his name for a

twenty-pound note. I wanted to go home, Robert; and it would have been something to call myself a wife, and to have a certificate of marriage, so I consented to this shameful proposal, and the ceremony took place. Alas! it availed me nothing; my tormentor was now seized with a fancy for detaining me in his grasp, and I was carried hither and thither at the will of a profligate tyrant. And so I was at last brought to a lodging near Covent Garden, to be again in the power of those female wretches whose tyranny was even worse than his, for it was coarser. If I did not sink to the veriest infamy and become like them, a wretch for hire, I have to thank God, not Everard Lestrangle. From this hell upon earth one way of escape was offered me. I was told that my marriage with Mr. Hay was no marriage, for he had half a dozen wives in as many countries, but that you were willing to marry me—you had been told my true story, and were yet willing. The reprobate Roderick Ainsleigh's son could stoop to a baseness impossible for Mr. Lestrangle. *This* is what my destroyer told me. Oh, Robert, forgive me, forgive me! I believed him, and lent myself to his villainous plot. My eyes were opened when you spurned me—still more fully opened when I saw you seized by those ruffians. Then came a pause—a long oblivion of fever and delirium—and I woke in a garret in that thrice-cursed house by Covent Garden, to find myself watched by one poor creature who had always pitied me. She was not an honest woman, but she had what those other harpies had not—a heart. She had been bred among strolling players, had come to London to play small parts in one of the patent theatres, and, being dismissed for incompetency, had fallen into the shameful ways of the wretches with whom I found her. What time she lived with them I know not, but she was no longer young. They were tired of her, she of them; she was the drudge of the house; and knowing my desire to escape, she offered to depart with me, and to put me in a way of earning my living among her old friends, the country players. I thanked and blessed her for the thought; and one night we stole away unquestioned, while the noisy inmates of that place of infamy were carousing. My friend kept her promise. She put me in the way of earning a living—such a living, Robert!—but it was something for so forlorn a creature as I to live honestly. For a long time I was the most mechanical drudge that ever slaved at a master's bidding. But one day I awoke to a sudden pleasure in my art; I, the tragedy-queen of a booth, I heard of Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Woffington and Mrs. Clive; and the thought came to me like an inspiration, that I might win a name like theirs—I, the castaway, might become more famous than the ambassador's son who had flung me into the gutter. With this fancy came a new pleasure in my art; life was changed for me. I no longer brooded on my own miseries.

I thought of Juliet's sorrows and Lady Macbeth's ambition, the madness of Constance, the shame of Jane Shore. From that hour, I suppose, I began to be an actress. It was not till two years afterwards that Mr. Garrick saw me, and brought me to London. Perhaps you know the rest."

"Yes, Margery, I know that you are now the most famous woman in London, and that the name under which you have won renown is stainless."

"That name, yes, Robert; but not the name of my mother's daughter. There are grand houses open to receive me in London, fine ladies eager to shower favours on me in the caprice of an idle moment; but the cottage in which I was born is shut against me. How shall I repay Sir Everard Lestrangle for the misery of my youth, the bitter remorse of my womanhood! Do you think I forgive or forget, Robert, or that I do not hunger for revenge?"

"Leave that to me, Margery. I have a catalogue of wrongs that only blood can blot out; and you have your revenge in this scoundrel's public pursuit of you, which must end in his public mortification."

"What! you know of that too, Robert? Yes; Everard Lestrangle has done his utmost to dishonour the name I now bear, as he dishonoured that which I inherited from my father. You could never imagine the obstinacy of his pursuit—it is an unrelenting persecution. They even tell me he has laid a wager that he will make me his avowed mistress before this year is over. And do you think he loves me, even with the libertine's base passion? No, Robert, *his* passion is a mixture of vanity and malice. I was once his slave, and although he cast me off, he cannot forgive me for having escaped him. The world—*his* world—is pleased to admire me, and to obtain the prize that other men covet he would commit any folly. Yes, this perhaps is a kind of vengeance, but a very poor one."

"Will you help me to a meeting with this villain, Margery? for I think you alone can do it."

"And such a meeting would end in blood, eh, Robert?"

"It could scarcely end otherwise. But you need not scruple to grant me this favour, Margery; or if I do not meet him with your help, I shall find other means. I have come fifteen thousand miles to pay my reckoning to Sir Everard Lestrangle."

"Fifteen thousand miles?"

On this I briefly related the story of my exile, to Margery's supreme admiration. The impulsive creature at once exalted me into a hero, and was ready to attribute the conquest of Bengal to Robert Ainsleigh instead of to Robert Clive.

"And you were in that prison where so many luckless wretches were smothered," she exclaimed, "and escaped to win fame and honour!"

"Nay, dear Margery, I have won little honour, but have been handsomely rewarded for doing my duty, and have returned to my native country with a modest fortune, instead of lying yonder in a ditch, where the bones of better men are mouldering. I make no doubt Mr. Lestrangle thought he had seen the last of me when he sold me captive to the India Company."

After this Mrs. Hunter dismissed me, with a hundred apologies, as it was high time she should change her dress and leave the theatre.

"The farce is a short one," she said, "and the house will soon be closing. Do not think I am tired of this talk, Robert—I could go on for ever; but folks watch and wonder so about an actress. It is hard to make the world believe one can act Jane Shore and yet be an honest woman."

She gave me both her hands again, praying that I would call upon her early next day at her lodgings in Surrey Street, out of the Strand. And thus we bade each other good-night, and I went back to my chambers in the Temple, wondering at the events of the evening. Not the least bewildering fact was the complete transformation of my foster-sister, who, from the simplest of rustic maidens, was changed into a perfect woman of the world, passionate, imperious, and most charming.

"I scarce wonder that Sir Everard is bewitched by his cast-off mistress," I said to myself. "He little knew what a gem he flung into the gutter. Yet he has a pearl of greater price at home, had he but the soul to appreciate that rarer, purer jewel."

Before noon next day I was at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings. She was not alone; a tall gentleman, dressed in rusty black, with a wan pallid face and a somewhat nervous manner, was in attendance upon her, and by his conduct on my entrance proclaimed his intention to remain. Mrs. Hunter regarded him with an air of undisguised vexation as she shook hands with me.

"I shall be at the theatre to-morrow morning, Mr. Johnson," she said, "and that will be quite soon enough for us to rehearse our scenes. I never yet could rehearse in a room."

"But I have stage-business in Jaffier that Garrick will do his best to spoil if he sees it at rehearsal," answered the gloomy stranger, who regarded me with a most sour visage. "You know now rabidly envious he is of any original touch of art. I should be better satisfied if we rehearsed the scene here. It would not detain you a quarter of an hour."

"But I have business with this gentleman, my dear Johnson"—here Mr. Johnson favoured me with an evil scowl—"and I know every turn of your head in Jaffier. Sure, we have played the two parts often enough together before Mr. Garrick had seen either of us, and when we were both strollers in a country barn."

The dismal gentleman groaned aloud. "Would to Heaven we had never risen from those humble fortunes!" he cried.

"Nay, for pity's sake, dear Johnson, do not be tragical. The sole fault thou hast is, that, not content with acting at night, thou art Hamlet or Othello all day long. I am in no humour for going back to the booths and the rustics, to see my one poor gown smeared with the grease of guttering tallow-candles that no one had time to snuff—for sure the candle-snuffer was always wanted to play priest or conspirator in the tragedy, or take the country-folks' money at the doors. No, Johnson, I have no wish to go back."

"Alas! no, madam, the town has spoiled her who was once the noblest and simplest of women; and you set more value on the empty compliments of rakes and fribbles than on the love of an honest man. But I forget myself. You have business with this gentleman, to whom you have not yet done me the favour to present me."

Margery shrugged her shoulders with the prettiest air of annoyance.

"Upon my honour, Johnson, you have acquired the art of being disagreeable. This gentleman is my—well, a kinsman—Mr. Ainsleigh by name, newly come home from the Indies, as you guess by his complexion, which is almost brown enough for Zanga; and I would have you beware how you blab of having seen him, since he does not want all Drury Lane to know of his return."

"Oh, be sure, madam, I shall be silent for your sake, if not for Mr. Ainsleigh's. Ill as you have treated me, I have still some regard for your reputation."

"Good heavens, sir!" cried Mrs. Hunter in a rage; "this is the veriest fooling."

"There is a kind of fooling, madam, by which honest men's hearts are broken."

"If the hearts of some folks I know are as soft as their heads, they are stuff that a child could break, sir. But I protest I am tired of this nonsense. My kinsman and I have business matters to talk of, and I must beg you to leave us."

"As you please, madam," cried this most tragic of tragedians; "you order me from your presence, doubtless, in order that you may complete the destruction of a newer victim. Coquetry so cruel is a vice of such enormity that I scarce wonder you have suffered yourself to become the town-talk by Sir Everard Lestranger's open pursuit of you."

"Have a care, sir!" I cried, with my hand upon my sword; "you have been told that I have the honour to be this lady's kinsman. You can scarce suppose I shall tamely stand by to see her insulted."

"Oh, for pity's sake, no quarrelling!" exclaimed Margery, grasping me by the arm. "Don't you see this Othello thirsts for your blood? Go, Mr. Johnson; Cassio himself was not so

innocent as this gentleman. Go, sir, immediately, if you would ever again be admitted to my presence."

"Falsest, most cruel of women, I obey!" cried the actor. He paused but an instant to defy me with a tragic scowl, clapped his hat on his head, and flung himself out of the room.

"Mad!" cried Mrs. Hunter; "madder than Hamlet or Lear for they at least had cause for their lunacy."

"And has this poor wretch none?"

"None but a diseased vanity, and a foolish jealousy of one who never favoured his addresses by so much as a look or a word beyond the commonest friendship. Do not set me down as a coquette, Robert, because that man reproaches me. On my honour, he has no right to do so. We acted the leading characters together in those small country theatres where I learned my trade; and there are some men who cannot play Romeo to a decent-looking Juliet half a dozen times without falling over head and ears in love with her. This poor fellow is that kind of foolish, impressionable creature, and we played the lovers for near three years. In all that time he was for ever plaguing me to marry him. He has an unconscionable estimate of his own talents, and sets it down to David Garrick's envy that he has not taken the town by storm ere this. He was engaged to play third-rate characters, but sometimes gets a leading part when our manager is out of humour with the public, or disposed for idleness at Hampton. And this unlucky Mr. Johnson, who will never be better than a Bartholomew-fair ranter, believes it would be the happiest thing for me to become his wife. And he will not accept a simple refusal, though I have told him a hundred times I shall never marry. In plain words, the man is the torment of my life. He dogs my footsteps at every turn, and if he were not altogether too ridiculous a creature, would be a most serious trouble to me."

"Let me be the champion to rid you of this foolish persecutor, as well as of another, more vicious than foolish."

"No, Robert, not for worlds would I have you harm a hair of that simple creature's head. You do not know what a heart he has in spite of his follies."

We talked long. I told Margery all that happened in India between Philip Hay and myself, and handed her the certificate of that marriage in Paris which gave her a name that, if obscure, was at least legally her own. I urged upon her that she should go to her father, trusting fully in the strength of his love, and the influence of her beauty and success, which must needs make that honest fellow proud of his kindred with a woman whose genius had made her famous.

She shook her head sadly. "I doubt whether he would think much of that, Robin," she said. His only notion of an actress is taken from the painted trollop he has seen outside the booths



at Warborough fair, and he would esteem it a sorry distinction that I should have won honour and riches by such a trade."

"I will bring him up to London, Margery, and show you to him—take him into the pit unawares, as I went myself, and let him see you in the blaze of your beauty. 'Twould go hard but that melted him."

Mistress Hunter blushed and sparkled at this.

"Thou hast the happiest fancy, Robin," she answered. "If he saw me play Juliet I think it might touch him. Or perhaps the Grecian daughter would be most melting. Or in Jane Shore he would see that a woman who has sinned may yet have a conscience."

"There shall be no hint of sin, my dear. He shall see thee as Juliet, and be warned by thy tragical end against the hard-heartedness of fathers."

It was marvellous how Margery brightened at this notion. She had the true artist's love of her art, and the idea of acting before her father, and by her fictitious woes winning him to compassionate her real misfortunes, enchanted her. I left her in the gayest spirits, and full of gratitude for what she was pleased to call my goodness.

"Heaven has given you to me for my brother and defender, dear friend," she said at parting; and there was a frankness in her looks and tones that told me she was now my friend only:—that the girlish fancy which had grown up out of our childish association was a fancy of the past.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### I FIND THAT I AM NOT FORGOTTEN.

As the porter had told me that Sir Everard and his lady were to return to London immediately, I now began to consider the best means of approaching the scoundrel, whose chastisement was the chief business that had brought me back to England. That Lady Barbara had made a will in my favour, and that Everard Lestrangle had suppressed it, was a notion that had taken root in my mind; but reflection only served to convince me more fully of the uselessness of any attempt to bring this fact to light. The man who drew up the will was in his grave—the will itself had been doubtless reduced long ago to a little heap of gray ashes which a breath might disperse. More idle than the dream of an idiot was any thought of what my benefactress might have intended, or the heritage I might have lost.

I resigned myself, therefore, to the conviction that I had been cheated, and was without hope of redress. Even if it were possible for ingenuity to discover evidence of the wrong that had been done me, I had not the cast of mind which could adapt itself to so slow a process, or follow a villain through

all the narrow crooked ways of his villany to the broad light of day. Nor was the wealth I had perchance been robbed of a boon so precious in my estimation. I had seen in that melancholy instance of Omichund to what a degraded condition the accursed hunger of gold may reduce a man, and I could believe that my generous benefactress had bequeathed me the bulk of her fortune, and let the prize slip with scarce a sigh. No—it was not because he had cheated me of this world's wealth that I hated Everard Lestrangle, but because he had stolen the woman I loved.

While I brooded over the speediest means of securing a meeting with him, I was sorely puzzled to find a friend who would carry a challenge for me, without running the hazard of being kicked out of doors by my fine gentleman. Had I been in Calcutta I could have pitched upon half a dozen gentlemen willing to do me the service, but in this vast city I stood alone, and knew not where to turn for a serviceable acquaintance who could help me through the formalities of a gentlemanlike quarrel. This necessity took me daily to the coffee-house, where I might perchance pick up an acquaintance of sufficient standing to verve my turn. I breakfasted at one house, dined at another, and spent my evenings at a third, and looked about me for the kind of man in whom I might safely confide my private business, and whose friendship might be worth cultivating. I knew that many a life-long alliance had begun with a remark on the ministry, or the handling of a newspaper, and that it needs not a formal letter of introduction to cement an acquaintance between honest men. I was still young, but I had seen the world, and had too much experience to be trapped a second time by a man of Philip Hay's stamp.

I walked in St. James's Square after nightfall now, just as I had walked in those hopeless days, years ago. I saw the house lighted as of old, and was on one occasion just in time to see a carriage drive away from the door, which I conjectured to contain her whose face it would have been rapture for me to look upon. Yet I made no open attempt to see Lady Lestrangle. Eager as I was to justify myself to her, I was still more eager to revenge myself upon her husband. When that was done, that old score blotted out, I would tell her my story. She might be so well drilled as to repulse me with incredulity and contempt; but she might listen and believe, and in that case my task would have been accomplished, and I should go back to India leaving behind me not one link to attach me to my native country.

But what a fool is he who plans his life as precisely as your Dutch gardener cut outs the geometrical beds in his garden! Nothing came to pass as I had forecast it.

It so happened that, whilst I was choosing the messenger to

carry my challenge, chance threw me across the pathways of Lady Lestrange. I was idling away an empty afternoon near the entrance to the ring in Hyde Park, wondering at the splendour and variety of the equipages, without any pleasure in their magnificence or interest in their owners, when I saw an open chariot coming towards me, in which there sat a solitary lady with a dog in her lap—one of those coffee-coloured pugs I had been so familiar with in my Lady Barbara's dressing-room. I could have fancied it was Basto, or Spadillio himself—the very creature I had fondled many a time out of sheer idleness in that brief summer-tide of my life.

The lady was Dora—changed, and yet strangely the same. Lovelier and more brilliant than I remembered her, but with enough of the old expression to set my heart beating like a whitesmith's hammer, and to cloud my eyes with a mist that was more passionate than tears.

She was smiling on her friends as she rode towards me, radiant and beaming. Heavens, she is happy then! I said to myself, with ineffable bitterness. She is happy—your true woman of fashion, who thinks more of the liveries of her footmen and the price of her horses than of a husband's character. What is a husband made for, in such a world as this, except to pay a milliner's bill with civility—and keep his distance? And is this the girl who melted in my arms at Vauxhall that night, and would have trusted a penniless adventurer with her heart and fortune?

I had but a short time for such unworthy doubts. In the next minute I saw the sweet face change—the delicate bloom fade into a sickly pallor—and I knew that I was recognized.

Nor had I any reason to complain of my angel's coldness. She half stood up in her carriage, and bade her coachman stop his horses with a peremptory suddenness that somewhat startled the fellow. He drew up close to the path on which I stood, indifferent as to what inconvenience he might occasion to the vehicles that followed him.

She leant out of her carriage to speak to me.

"Mr. Ainsleigh!" she exclaimed. "Yes, I knew you at a glance, although you are so much altered. In England, and not come near me!"

This with the sweetest air of reproach, and a look that thrilled my soul.

"Nay, madam," I said, with a calmness that cost me no small effort, "I did not know how I might be received. You have been, doubtless, taught to think me a scoundrel."

Her brow clouded, and grew almost stern as she answered me.

"Yes, sir, I have been deceived and undeceived again. My woman, Adolphine, died not long ago of a putrid fever. I nursed her, poor sinful creature, and on her death-bed she told me what had been done to you—the Fleet marriage—everything. If there

had been anything needed to widen the distance between Sir Everard Lestrangle and me, that discovery would have done it. But we had long been strangers."

All this in so low a voice that the loungers and passers-by had no reason to suspect our conversation was in any way out of the common. There was a hum and buzz of many voices, the sound of wheels, all the stir and bustle of a crowd. We were almost as much alone as in a wilderness.

Oh, with what a wicked joy was I inspired by this confession! They had long been strangers—nothing could widen the breach between them. That villain had stolen my darling from me, but had never been master of her heart.

"Yet you bear his name, Dora," I said; "and the town gives you credit for being happy."

"Would you have me parade my miseries before an unfeeling town?" she asked,—*"to have my domestic sorrow set in a ballad, perhaps. No, Mr. Ainsleigh, I glory in hiding the smart. I live in the midst of crowds, and wherever pleasure is to be sold, I am among the buyers."*

And then, struck, perchance, by my reproachful look, she added,—

*"But for this, Robert, I should have died long ago of a broken heart. We women have a knack of shutting our minds against thought."*

*"Yet I doubt if a round of frivolous pleasures can afford happiness to that Dora whom I knew at Hauteville,"* I said.

*"Happiness!"* she cried, with a little laugh that was all bitterness; *"I have forgotten the very flavour of that. The Dora whom you knew at Hauteville is dead—buried; buried with all her hopes and dreams. But let us drop this foolish, sentimental talk! Tell me how you have prospered—thank God, you have prospered, I see—and what chance brought you back to England."*

*"I have business here,"* I replied gravely.

*"Your own, or another's?"*

*"My own."*

She gave me a penetrating look, as if she half suspected my design.

*"Are you afraid to trust an old friend with your affairs?"* she asked.

*"Nay, dear lady, there is no one in whom I would sooner confide than yourself,"* I answered, somewhat evasively, *"if the affair were one which I was free to communicate; but it is not, and in some measure involves another than myself."*

*"Oh! And yet a moment ago you said it was your own business."*

*"My own and another's. There are few things in which a man may stand or fall by himself. If the issue is—as I hope, you shall be the first to hear of it."*

"I suppose I must be content with that," she answered reluctantly; "but there is something in your manner that disquiets me."

Tempted by the sweetness of her manner, forgetful of everything except how much I loved her, I ventured to ask whether I might not see her again shortly at her own house, since it was impossible we could talk long in that crowded place.

She shook her head sadly.

"Dear Mr. Ainsleigh, that cannot be," she said gravely. "It is a great happiness to me to see you again in England, a prosperous man, safely delivered from the wicked snare that was set for you. But Sir Everard Lestrangle is doubtless still your enemy, and your coming to St. James's Square might occasion mischief to all of us. In this world we must needs be strangers."

"Strangers! What, Dora, is there no such thing as friendship?"

"Not for me. I have no friends—not even among my own sex. The secrets of my unhappy life are too sad to be told, and there can be no friendship where there is no confidence. I must live and die alone, Mr. Ainsleigh."

"You called me Robert, just now," I said; "oh! why will you not trust me, Dora? I will be the faithfullest friend that ever a woman had, and will forget that I have ever been your lover—will school my heart to a worship so reverential, that you will have no excuse for avoiding me."

"No, Robert,—I will call you by the old name, since you prefer it—no, Robert, believe me, it is best we should be strangers. Any encounter between my husband and you must needs lead to ill consequences; and since he is my husband, I am bound to respect him."

"Respect!" I cried impatiently; "why not rather seek a release from a man whose conduct is an open insult to your goodness?"

"What release, Robert? There is none but death can deliver me. I do not believe in a divorce, even were it possible for me to obtain one, which I much doubt. No, Robert, I confess that the tie is hateful; but in an unlucky hour of weakness I consented to oblige my guardian by the sacrifice of my own inclination, and I must abide the consequences of my folly."

"Oh, Dora, that you had but known Everard Lestrangle's real character!"

"That was too carefully hidden from me. Even my dear aunt helped to deceive me, or at least suffered me to be deceived."

"I was persuaded that he was breaking his heart for me—that you had been false from the very first, and had only courted my fortune. Forgive me, Robert, for that fatal credulity. It has cost me very dear."

"It has cost me all the happiness of life," I answered bitterly. "What more could I say? The briefest reflection told me she was right. Between us two there could be no such thing as

friendship. It was a mere juggling with conscience to pretend it. That fond and passionate love for her which had smouldered so long in my heart burst into flame at sight of her, and I knew that I loved her as madly to-day as I had loved her that night at Vauxhall when she first permitted me to hope.

"Let us bid each other good-bye, Robert," she said softly, offering me her hand, which I pressed to my lips. "My husband walks here every afternoon, and I should not care for him to surprise us talking to each other."

Nor did I wish that my first encounter with Everard Lestrangle should take place in the presence of his wife. I had that to say to him which could not be said before her. So I submitted to bid her good-bye, and to see the chariot drive onward with its fair mistress, who looked, methought, more beautiful than a princess in a fairy tale, as she bowed and smiled upon her friends, kissing her hand to one, and recognizing another with a little wave of her fan, with the air of never having known a sorrow in her life. Women have surely a genius for that species of dissimulation. If a man is angry or sorrowful he will walk through the crowd with a moody brow, and scowl upon every creature he meets: but let a woman but know herself observed, the desire to be pleasing and beautiful will override every other feeling.

I was now resolved that there should be no more time wasted in deliberation. I had been in England nearly a month and nothing done, but after this meeting with Dora Lestrangle I was seized with an impatience that would brook no delay. The cry of my soul was like Othello's, "Blood, Iago, blood!"

I knew that she still loved me. How far I might have been governed by that precious security I can hardly tell, but I know that the thought did influence me. Beyond the bloody vision of a duel with that traitor there rose the star of hope. If he were slain and Dora set free! Yet at this point my sanguine fancies were suddenly put to flight. Would she, the most delicate and high-minded of women, accept a hand stained with her husband's blood? Base and false as he might have been, she would not the less abhor the act that freed her from him.

That which to my mind meant retribution, to hers would seem murder. Hope was barred this way, and the prospect gloomy. But my wrong was too deep for the possibility of forgiveness. Even at the hazard of losing Dora's esteem for ever, I must call Everard Lestrangle to account for his treachery.

The one solitary acquaintance I had by this time found in my favourite coffee-house—where I met many men who were good enough company for an idle hour, but few whom I could willingly have trusted with my confidence—was Mr. Thomas Briggs, a young naval officer, a daring open-hearted fellow, who had the very freshness and perfume of the sea about

him, I fancied, and of whose honesty and truth I never entertained a doubt.

Our first acquaintance arose one night when I had lingered at a coffee-house in Covent Garden later than usual, brooding upon my troubles over a solitary pint of wine, and with an unread newspaper before me. 'Twas close upon eleven o'clock, and the room almost empty, when the lieutenant, or the captain—as the head-waiter, a great personage in his way, was wont to call Mr. Briggs—came in fresh from Drury Lane Theatre, protesting, for the public ear of our shrunken assembly, in a sort of general appeal to the room, that there never before had lived so lovely and accomplished a creature as Mrs. Hunter, whom he had just seen acting Cordelia to Garrick's Lear.

"'Twas afflicted innocence and filial piety to the very life!" he exclaimed; "there was not a smack of sawdust or lamp-oil in the whole performance. The pit was crying like a child; and if there was a dry eye in the house during that melting last scene between the old king and his daughter, I would not give much for the heart of the man who owned it."

I was pleased by this hearty praise of my foster-sister, and still better pleased by the manner of the speaker, which had a frankness and vivacity that were actually refreshing after the affected supercilious air of those town-bred fine gentlemen I had grown familiar with, who seemed every one to speak and think alike—as if there were a general and prescribed model upon which every man moulded himself. I made room for Mr. Briggs beside me.

"The lady is a friend—almost a relative of mine," I said, "and it is very pleasant to me to hear her so warmly applauded."

"Nay, sir, you are under no obligation to me for doing what all the town does," he answered, taking the chair beside me.

"Perhaps not, sir, but there is a heartiness in your tone which makes your praise better worth having than the cool criticism of those fine gentlemen who seem to think more of their own cleverness in discriminating than the genius of the lady they admire, and who appear to consider they do her an honour by acknowledging her merits."

On this we grew wondrous friendly, drank our wine together, and sat talking of Margery till the house closed. Mr. Briggs was warmly interested when I told him this bright creature was my foster-sister, and that she had been reared in a game-keeper's cottage. He admired her all the more on discovering her humble origin, but was eager to know her present position, and whether there was any such person as Mr. Hunter.

"No," I answered; "the name of Hunter is an assumed one. The lady is the widow of a gentleman called Hay, who died not very long ago in the service of the East India Company. He

was by no means a good husband, and Margery has supported herself ever since her marriage."

"Noble soul!" cried the lieutenant. "Would to Heaven I had the honour of her acquaintance! She is a being I could worship."

I smiled at his enthusiasm, which I believed to be honest.

"Mrs. Hunter has a little too much of the worship of her admirers," I said, "and prefers to live retired. It is not to many men I would speak as freely of her as I have spoken to you; but I have a notion you may be trusted."

"Egad! sir, you are right. I would go through fire and water for that woman; ay, and ask no higher reward than the knowledge that I had done her a service."

We met at the same coffee-house several evenings after this, and the acquaintance thus begun ripened into something which I ventured to believe was friendship. Mr. Briggs communicated his affairs to me in a very free spirit. He was the second son of a Devonshire squire, with a small estate and a largish family—had been put in the navy when a boy—had fought under Keppel at Goree, and lived in hopes of speedily getting his rank as commander.

He was, like myself, an idler upon town, having a month's leave while his ship was under repair.

In return for his confidence, which extended to the smallest details of his life, I told him my own story, suppressing only that part which related to my marriage, and concerned Margery. It was enough for my purpose that he should know Mr. Lestranger had betrayed me into the hands of the East India Company's crimps, and sold me into slavery. That was sufficient ground for our quarrel. I had now made up my mind to employ Mr. Briggs as my friend in this matter. His position as an officer in his Majesty's navy raised him above the insolence of Sir Everard Lestranger—or at least I thought so, not knowing even yet how far that gentleman was capable of pushing his audacity.

The generous fellow fired at once on hearing of my wrongs.

"What! he sold you to those scoundrelly crimps in order to steal your mistress?" he exclaimed. "Was there ever a viler business! I will carry your message to him to-morrow morning—and, egad! if he refuses to fight you, he shall fight me."

"He will hardly dare refuse," I said.

But the issue proved that Sir Everard dared to be as insolent as he was treacherous.

Mr. Briggs went to White's Club-house three days after my interview with Dora, and waited in the strangers' room for Sir Everard, who came to him after upwards of an hour.

He stated his business in the briefest words, and he told me



that, practised dissembler as Lestrangle evidently was, he started and whitened to the lips at the news of my return.

"What!" he cried, "did not that carrion perish with the rest in the Black Hole? Mongrels have long lives, it seems."

"Mr. Ainsleigh is no mongrel," my friend answered, stoutly, "but the lawful son of his father, Roderick Ainsleigh, who is still living, and whom he had the good fortune to meet in Bengal."

"Sir, I congratulate you upon your skill as a romancer—an invention which Mr. Richardson might envy," this gentleman replied, with a sneer. "The Roderick Ainsleigh with whose name you seem so familiar was killed in a tavern brawl—the natural doom of a drunkard and bully—six-and-twenty years ago."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Mr. Briggs; "but that matters very little. I am here on the part of Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, his son, now an ensign in the East India Company's service."

"And pray, sir, what has Mr. Robert Ainsleigh to solicit of me?"

"He has nothing to solicit, but something to demand," replied my friend. "There are some quarrels that will keep a long time. Mr. Ainsleigh's quarrel with you is no whit the cooler than when he was forced out of the country, without the power to avenge himself."

"I have no quarrel with Mr. Ainsleigh, sir. Eagles do not eat flies. I only quarrel with men of my own rank."

"I will not dispute your own measure of your importance, sir, which may elevate you to a level with princes, for anything I know. But, waiving all the claims of birth, Mr. Ainsleigh is an officer in the East India Company's service, and a worthy antagonist. I must beg you to give him an immediate opportunity of settling the little matter between you."

"And I repeat, sir, that there is no matter between us. I no more recognise Mr. Ainsleigh's right to challenge me than I should that of my French cook to demand satisfaction for a word or two of abuse on the score of an ill-dressed dinner. I doubt, sir, you are espousing a cause of which you know very little. This person had plotted to rob me of my affianced wife—for the sake of her fortune, mark you!—being all the while the sworn lover of a country wench, his foster-sister; and in order to circumvent him I had recourse to a recruiting sergeant in the Company's service, who was willing to put this trickster in the way of earning an honest living. That is my crime, Mr. Briggs; nor shall I blush to avow it to the world, if need be. But as for crossing swords with this adventurer, who has escaped a gallows, while better men swing daily at Tyburn, I say again, I would as soon fight one of my lacqueys!"

On this Mr. Briggs grew warm, swore that Sir Everard should be forced to give me a speedy meeting, and challenged him on his own account, for a want of civility to himself—a challenge the gentleman found it impossible to refuse. So my friend called upon an acquaintance on his way back to the tavern where he had left me waiting the result of his mission, and despatched him straight to White's to settle a speedy meeting with Sir Everard.

"I shall have to put some insult on him in public," I cried indignantly, when Mr. Briggs had related the foregoing conversation. "As for your fighting with him, my dear fellow, that is a mere folly. He is no doubt better at the small sword than you; he will have the choice of weapons, and may run you through the lungs."

The lieutenant told me what Sir Everard had said of my foster-sister; but this I put aside as the baseless slander of a scoundrel, and Mr. Briggs was fully satisfied with my denial. I was glad to find there had been no mention of the Fleet marriage, since it would have been difficult for me to explain that transaction without discredit to Margery.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### I OBTAIN SATISFACTION.

I WAS now secretly determined to stand no longer on punctilio, but to force an encounter with my enemy. Delay had not lessened, but increased, my desire for revenge. That passion had burned, a constant flame, in all those years of exile. Let me but rid the world of this villain, release Dora from her hateful ties, and I cared little what became of my worthless life, or in what Indian ditch I found my last resting-place.

Release Dora! ay, even though I set her at liberty to bless another with that love which I dared not hope could be mine. Should fortune favour my just cause, and I survive the meeting I was bent upon bringing about, I should be every whit as much cut off from all chance of gaining my angel, as in the event of my death.

I went home, and wrote a long letter to Dora—there was a kind of bitter sweetness even in holding this converse with her—a letter explaining my motives, and justifying my actions. This I put up in a sealed cover, addressed to my friend Thomas Briggs, the enclosure to be delivered only if I fell.

Having done this, I went out into the streets, as yet not quite resolved as to what I should do, but with a savage determination to meet Everard Lestrangle, face to face, before the day was ended.

I walked westward, and before I had gone far decided on proceeding straight to St. James's Square, there to ascertain where my gentleman might be found. It was not in his own

house that I cared to encounter him. I shrank from the idea of a deadly quarrel beneath that roof which sheltered Dora, and I knew not to what lengths passion might carry me when I looked on the hated countenance of the traitor who had undone me. My desire was to meet him in public, and, if need were, put such open insult upon him, that the necessity of wiping out his own injury would oblige him to give me satisfaction for mine.

My knowledge of Sir Everard's habits led me to suppose there would be little hazard of my finding him at home at this time of the day, and the result proved my conjecture just. The porter informed me that his master was rarely to be found in his house after breakfast—a meal which he took alone in his dressing-room at any hour before midday. This afternoon he had left word that he should go straight from his club to the House of Commons, where Mr. Pitt was expected to speak. I went down to the door of the House, and there discovered, from the general aspect of the scene, that the question of the day had not yet begun. There was a sprinkling of gossips and starers about the doors waiting to see the ministers—an assembly which grew more numerous as I waited, but which was so slender when I arrived as to allow of my posting myself close against the entrance to the house.

I had provided myself with a short leathern horsewhip before leaving my chambers, but made no parade of this weapon, which I carried inside my coat. Armed thus, I waited for my enemy, lending but an indifferent ear to the gossip of the bystanders, every one of whom affected to be an oracle to his neighbour, and laid down the law with an air of indisputable authority.

The House was filling rapidly. The senators passed me in rapid succession, sometimes single, sometimes in little groups of two and three, eagerly discussing the business of the afternoon. Now and then a person of public distinction was received with some slight spontaneous acclamation, and bowed civilly, or smiled his gratitude, in acknowledgement of the compliment. I had stood thus waiting and watching for upwards of an hour, and began to think that every member of the House must have passed me by, and to surmise that the person I watched for had gone in before I arrived, when I at last beheld the traitor approaching between two gentlemen, one of whom was elderly, of a military aspect and somewhat dissolute air, the other a fopling, scarce emerged from boyhood.

The crowd had lessened after the passing of Pitt and his colleagues, and there now remained only a few stragglers, who waited, I imagine, rather from the lack of anything better to do with themselves than from any warm interest in the scene.

"Don't forget our little supper after the opera, Lestranger," said the fopling, as the three men paused a few paces from where I stood, and seemed about to part company. "Sure,

you'll not waste so pleasant an evening in yonder Temple of dulness! Lady Millicent is to be one of us, and you know she swears existence is scarce worth having, in the shape of a supper-party, that is to say, without Sir Everard Lestrangle."

"Lady Millicent is vastly civil; but civilities from a woman on the wrong side of thirty, who owes her figure to her mantua-maker, and her complexion to a liberal use of white-lead, are hardly in my way," said Sir Everard, in the slow, sneering tones that recalled all my old feelings of aversion. "However, if you really want me, I'll come. Out of sheer good-nature towards you, Pynsent, upon my honour."

He said this loud enough to be heard by the bystanders, and was evidently gratified by the suppressed titter that rewarded his humour. As he turned to survey the populace with a languid grin, his eyes met mine, and his face changed in an instant from its affected smile to a look of ferocity that was not unmingled with alarm.

His hand went to his sword-hilt involuntarily, but before he could draw the weapon, which I believe he would have done in an instinctive movement of self-defence, I had seized him by the cravat with my left hand, and stood so close against him, face to face, that he had no liberty for his sword-arm.

I had left mine free, however, and snatchng the horsewhip from my breast, I held it firmly grasped, and in a convenient position for laying on the lash.

"Look you here, Sir Everard Lestrangle," I said, "I have come here prepared to give you the beating you deserve; but as you bear the name of a lady I honour, I don't mean to horsewhip you unless you force me to it. I sent you a challenge this morning, which you declined. I invite you this evening to meet me like a man, or submit to be beaten like a dog."

The military gentleman gripped me by the arm, and tried to drag me off his friend, with a volley of abuse, but I was the stronger of the two, and held my foe firmly by the throat.

The fopling stood and stared with a glass in his eye, useless as Lot's wife after her unlucky transformation.

"Constables!" cried the officer; "Great Heaven! where are the constables?" And then in a general appeal to the bystanders, "Will you see a gentleman strangled?"

There was a movement among the crowd, and an official of some kind who had been guarding the door came towards me.

I sent the lash swirling through the air, and brought it down upon the scoundrel's shoulders with so hearty an application that the oath with which he greeted the blow was more like a scream of pain.

"Will you meet me now, Everard Lestrangle?" I asked, "or will you give me in charge to the constabulary, like the craven cur I believe you are, because you are afraid to cross swords with

the man whom you cheated out of his wife, and then sold to the East India House crimps?"

"Do you hear this fellow, Blagrove?" exclaimed Lestrangle. "What say you—shall I give him in custody for assault, or leave you to settle the matter for me? 'Tis a base-born dog for a gentleman to fight."

This was in an undertone to his friend, the soldier.

"Give him in charge!" shrieked the fopling; "give the ruffian in charge!"

The official laid his paw on my shoulder, and tried to wrench the whip from my hand; but I shook myself free from his grasp, and he stood at my elbow waiting for instructions.

"In my opinion, there is but one way of settling the business," answered Major Blagrove.

"You may let the fellow go," said Sir Everard. "I have a longish score to settle with him, and can find my own manner of payment. Step this way, sir," he said to me, with his haughtiest air, and then walked away from the bystanders, his friends and I following. We halted at a quiet corner, four or five hundred yards from the House of Commons.

"Now, sir," said Lestrangle, "I am at your service." And then turning to the Major, he went on coolly,—“It was a mere scruple of honour that withheld me from fighting him. You know I am no tyro in the use of pistol or small-sword, and one fellow the more sent untimely to Limbo, is no such heavy burden on my conscience. Hark ye, sir, I have agreed to meet your friend the sailor on Wimbledon Common at daybreak to-morrow—the sun rises about six, doesn't he, Major?—and I have no objection to try my hand on you when I have done with him. Shall we have pistols or small-swords, Blagrove? We had best settle the preliminaries at once. There is no occasion for punctilio in this case.”

The last words were spoken with as contemptuous a tone as he could command.

"Small-swords, by all means," replied the Major, with a heartiness which smacked of actual enjoyment. "Where am I to find your friend, sir?"

"At the 'King's Head' in Covent Garden, from eight o'clock this evening," I answered.

"Is it the sailor you sent to me this morning?" asked Lestrangle.

"The same, sir."

"And if I happen to run him through in the first affair, sir, who is to be your second?"

"In that case I can fight without one," I replied; "but I have a notion that Providence will hardly permit so worthy a life as that of Lieutenant Briggs to be sacrificed, while Sir Everard Lestrangle goes unscathed."

"The ways of Providence are somewhat like a deal of cards, sir," said Lestrangle, with a cynical laugh; "and it is not always the best man whose hand holds most trumps. Until to-morrow morning, sir, I have the honour to be your very obedient servant. Come, Major, we may as well hear the debate." He lifted his hat with an ironical courtesy, and walked away with his friend. The fopling loitered behind, staring at me as if, from the fact of having engaged to fight Sir Everard Lestrangle, I had become a natural curiosity.

"If you have anything to bequeath, my friend," he drawled at last, "you had best go home and make your will. 'Twill not be the first time Lestrangle has killed his man, if he leaves you carrion to-morrow morning."

"I thank you, sir, for your advice, and shall hold myself equal to either fortune."

I took my way to the tavern where I had first seen Mr. Briggs, and at which he and I had met habitually since our first encounter. I was in excellent spirits. The possibilities of the next morning gave me not the least uneasiness. Fortune had been very hard upon me, and I held my life as a possession so worthless, that I did not even take the trouble to consider the hazard of its coming to a sudden end within a dozen hours.

I had tasted revenge. Let Everard Lestrangle carry off the matter as lightly as he might, the sting of my lash still tingled upon his shoulders, and the smart of the public affront that I had put upon him would stick to him when that sting was forgotten. No words can describe the savage joy which possessed me in that one exquisite moment when I struck the blow; it had needed as much resolution as I could command not to make the most of my opportunity, and thrash him soundly. But knowing myself his superior in strength and bulk, as I was above him in height, I had put a check upon the inclination to inflict so brutal a chastisement. I only wanted to provoke him into fighting me. Yet so sweet had been that one brief sensation, that I was fain to confess that some element of the savage remains in a man in spite of his civilization. 'Tis only superficial polish after all, this system of education and manners which has grown up out of seventeen centuries of Christianity, and the fine gentleman in point lace ruffles needs but to be angry to develop as fierce a spirit as ever burned in the breasts of those forefathers of ours, who stained themselves with woad, and worshipped in the mystic circle of Stonehenge.

I found my friend at the tavern, drinking a bowl of punch with Captain Crucknell, the gentleman who was to be his second next morning. I told him what had happened, and left him to receive Major Blagrove, and to make all arrangements for me.

"Are you good at the small-sword?" he asked anxiously,

I had not handled a rapier half a dozen times in my life, but I took care not to tell him as much.

"I have no anxiety about my share of to-morrow's work," I answered lightly; "I am only sorry that you have involved yourself in an unnecessary quarrel."

"Unnecessary quarrel! Why, the fellow treated me as if I had been the scum of the earth. I only hope I shall spoil his sword-arm for the next twelve months. The first mate and I used to have a fencing match every morning, on board the *Cadmus*, and I am not so bad a swordsman as you may think, Mr. Ainsleigh!"

I had very little doubt that he was a better man than I, but kept my own counsel, and left him to his company and his punch, after he had promised to look in upon me in Brick Court the last thing at night, to let me know his plans for the next morning.

I went straight to my chambers, and devoted the remaining hours of my evening in arranging and destroying a few private papers, and writing two more letters—the first to my generous friend Mr. Holwell, and the second to Mr. Swinfen, both containing some kind of justification of my conduct. I then drew up a brief form of will, in which I bequeathed all I possessed to my faithful friend John Hawker.

This I kept open till Mr. Briggs came, when I signed it in the presence of himself and a neighbour, who signed it after me as witnesses.

This document being duly signed and attested, and my neighbour retired to his own rooms, whence I had fetched him to do me this service, I placed it with the two letters I had just written, and the letter to Dora, written that morning, in a cover, which I carefully sealed and addressed to Mr. Swinfen. Below the address I wrote these words—"To be delivered in the event of any misfortune happening to Robert Ainsleigh;" and this being done, I felt that my worldly affairs were settled.

"If Lestranger kills me—as I cannot doubt he will try to do—you will see that this packet is delivered—won't you, Briggs?" I asked.

"But don't you think he's just as likely to give me *ex quietus*?" said my friend.

"No; I look upon your duel as an idle ceremony. Scoundrel as he is, he can bear no grudge against you—and as a man of the world, he would hardly embarrass himself by an unnecessary homicide—a murder which could have no flavour in it, since he cannot possibly hate you!"

I put the packet in my desk, which was always left open, and where my friend, or any one else, would easily find it.

Mr. Briggs slept at my chambers that night, on a mattress which I spread for him before the fire. It was the end of April,

but chilly weather, and there was a drizzling rain falling when we left the temple next morning, before it was light. Captain Cruicknell called for us at five o'clock, and we all three set out together. Never had I seen a drearier daybreak—the streets were sloppy, the sky low and gray, the smoke of newly kindled fires beaten down by the dampness of the atmosphere, the barges on the river scarce distinguishable through the thick leaden-coloured mist.

Sunrise there was none—the dark gray of the sky changed to a somewhat lighter gray, and that was all. Yet I was in no way depressed by the gloom of the weather. Never since my return from India had my spirits been so light—never since the great day of Plassey had I felt so agreeable an excitement.

We found a hackney-coach near Blackfriars Bridge, and bade the man drive us as fast as his horses would go to the windmill on Wimbledon Common. He brightened at the order, and I believe he smoked our business, and was elated by the prospect of a liberal fee.

The drive was a long one. My friend Briggs, who was in a very lively humour, gave me some sage advice about the management of my weapon.

"He will make a feint in *carte*, and then disengage quickly, and try to pierce you with a downward thrust in tierce, very like," he said; "it was a rare trick of that rascal, the first mate. But don't you let go his eye. Whatever he is going to do, be sure you'll see it in his eye."

With this, and much more counsel of the same kind, Mr. Briggs and his friend Captain Cruicknell favoured me as we drove along the rural lanes—past the villages of Wandsworth and Putney, and up the hill towards Wimbledon. I heard, yet heard them not, for my mind was employed in that strange panoramic survey of all my past life which is said to be exhibited to the mental vision of a drowning man in the few moments of his death-agony. The Warr ner's lodge—the library at Hauteville—the fort at Calcutta—the domes and minarets of Muxadavad—all the places and persons that had figured in the story of my life drifted backward and forward across my brain like the changing shadows from a magic lantern, and all this time my good friend Briggs and the worthy Captain of the *Cadmus* went prosing on about *carte* and tierce.

The day was lighter, but not much brighter, when we arrived at our destination—a kind of grassy platform on the highest part of the common, where there was a windmill, which seemed to have fallen into disuse. We left the coach a few yards from this windmill, and I gave the driver a guinea, and bade him wait for us at a turn in the road which I pointed out to him; where he would be handy when we wanted him, and yet too far off to observe our movements. I had, however, very little doubt that



he knew the nature of our business, as this locality was notorious for such meetings; and it was as much the right thing to fight at Wimbledon, as to drink at the "Cocoa-tree," or gamble at New-market.

The fine straight rain was still falling, but the day was mild, and there was a perfume of spring in the atmosphere. The furze was in bloom here and there, the blackthorn in full flower, the hawthorn-bushes bursting into leaf; and, for the first time since my coming back to England, I heard the skylark. It is impossible for me to say how keenly that shrill sweet song moved me. It was at Hanteville I had last listened to it. We were the first upon the ground, but we had not long to wait. A light curricule came spinning along the high road, and stopped a little way from where we alighted. Sir Everard, who had been driving himself, flung the reins to his groom, paused for a minute as if to give the man some instruction, and then came slowly across the grass towards us with Major Blagrove at his side.

He honoured my companion with a little insolent bow, which was more contemptuous than no salute at all: myself he altogether ignored. He drew off his gloves, took off his coat, and prepared himself for the first encounter with the utmost deliberation, and a lazy air, as of a man half-awakened. After his sword had been duly measured and handed to him even, he stopped to indulge himself with a yawn.

"Now, Mr. Briggs," said the Major; and in the next moment I heard the sharp clash of steel, and knew that the business had begun. I had mounted a little hillock a few paces from the combatants, and stood looking down at them.

Alas, for my poor friend's fine theories about *carte et tierce*! Alas, for the experience derived from daily exercise with the first mate of the *Cadmus*! A glance told me that he was the merest child in the hands of his antagonist. That firm wrist, that easy attitude, bespoke Sir Everard Lestrange an accomplished swordsman. I remembered his giving me a fencing lesson one morning in the hall at Hanteville, and laughing at my clumsiness, in those early days of our acquaintance when he affected a friendly feeling for me. How angry I felt with myself for not having taken the pains to make myself a master of this useful accomplishment!

The issue did not long remain doubtful. With a stroke so dexterous that the movement which accompanied it was scarcely perceptible, Sir Everard ran his sword through my friend's right arm. Poor Tom Briggs gave a groan and dropped his weapon. "There sir," said Sir Everard, "I think that is enough for you. I harbour no rancour, and have no wish to prolong so silly a quarrel; so, if you will tie your handkerchief round your arm, you can officiate for your friend yonder."

Mr. Briggs bowed; and his second, Captain Crucknell, con-

trived to bind his arm, which bled pretty freely, with a silk handkerchief that was almost big enough for the flag of a man-of-war. My friend Thomas has since told me that he suffered a mortal agony, but would have allowed his entrails to be gnawed, like the Spartan lad in the apologues, rather than betray any sign of his torture to Sir Everard.

"I had some conceit in my sword-play, Bob," he said, "and to think what a fool that scoundrel made of me. He did not give me an opportunity for one of my favourite feints. I was nowhere from the beginning."

My own turn now came. I took my sword, with a feeling that this satisfaction which I had desired so eagerly was in some sort a suicide. But there was no pang of regret in the thought, so little was my life worth to me. I should have rejoiced had I been permitted to rid the earth of this villain; but if Fate, which from my youth upward had served me so hardly, were still against me, I was content.

We crossed swords. Lestrangle seemed to hold his so lightly that a dexterous twist of mine might have whipped it out of his hand, but it was the lightness and delicacy of an experienced swordsman. Yet I think he was hardly master of himself in this encounter, hatred held such complete possession of him; and had he been anything less accustomed to the exercise, or I a little more skilled in it, I might have gained an advantage over him. His countenance was livid with fury; and after a few formal passes he appeared to lose patience, and thrust at me with *coupé* after *coupé*, and with an amazing rapidity, breaking down my guard, and touching me with every thrust.

"Stop, Lestrangle!" cried Major Blagrove; "the fellow is wounded—'tis enough surely. Don't you see the blood on his shirt?"

The words were scarce spoken when I fell heavily, with my face towards the morning sky, and lay on the wet grass looking upward, with the skylark's song in my ears, and a vague idea that my life was fast ebbing away. The day had brightened a little; there was a milky gleam of sunshine between the clouds. I heard voices above me consulting hurriedly, felt myself lifted from the ground, and, while my friends were thus raising me swooned from the agony of a wound in my breast.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### I SEEM TO BE INCONSTANT.

FOR nearly three months I lay at the point of death, or I should say rather, that during so long a period the issue was uncertain, and my malady might, at any moment, have ended fatally. During the greater part of that time I was out of my senses, and yet there is, strange to say, no episode of my life which I remem-

ber more keenly than the acute sufferings, mental and physical, of those dreary days and nights in which I lay at the mercy of a couple of hired nurses, at my chambers in Brick Court.

Poor Tom Briggs was laid up at the same time with his wounded arm, which kept him abed until the repairs of the *Cadmus* were finished, and it was time for him to rejoin that vessel. I was thus left for some weeks—which seemed an eternity of suffering—wholly in the hands of these two venal hags, who haled me about as if I had been a log, incapable of pain, poured nauseous medicines down my throat with a roughness which made their abominable drugs doubly nauseous, and administered poultices and cataplasms with an inhumanity which would have made such remedial processes an admirable adjunct to the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition.

To this day I have a picture often before my mental vision of this pair of tormentors, sitting at a little table by the fire playing cards, with a gin-bottle between them, and their grim shadows looming large upon the wall of my dimly lighted chamber. Fever made me delirious, and the stimulants that were freely administered to me to sustain a life which, by pain and loss of blood, was reduced to its lowest ebb, produced a morbid activity of the brain that degenerated into a noisy madness. For nights and days I acted over and over again, in my own rambling fashion, the events of my Indian campaign—was with Holwell at Fort William, or with Clive in the Mango Grove; now rescued Tara from the awful scene of murder in Omichund's mansion; now panted for breath amid the horrors of the Black Hole. Further back even went fancy and memory, and I was at Hauteville again, defending myself against the false accusations of Sir Marcus Lestrangle.

With these recollections of realities were intermingled the visions of things that had never been—the faces of persons I had never known—which were yet none the less real to me in those hours of distraction, while, on the other hand, people who had played only the most trivial and accidental part in my life, people I had known long ago and forgotten, mixed themselves in all my visions, and became characters of supreme importance in this confused and yet vivid panorama.

Nor did the exaggeration of a disordered intellect—in which, as I conceive, the sense of wonder was unduly excited—end here. My own position underwent a strange transformation in these delirious visions. My Indian career was the triumph of a soldier and a politician who had taken the world by storm. It was not Clive, but I, who saved Bengal. Nay, I was Clive himself—at times losing all consciousness of my own identity, and acting the leading part in the great drama of which I had been an admiring spectator.

In these fantastic visions death was not. I saw Lady Barbara

in the flower of her matronly beauty, and told myself that the story of her death had only been a trick played upon me. Philip Hay, too, lived again, and was faithful to me. In every interval of physical pain my visions were of a roseate hue.

Yet, in all my delusions, I had an ever present consciousness of the two beldames who nursed me—the dingy withered hands—the foul breath—which were an unspeakable torture to my senses. Thus, for an eternity of pain and perplexity I struggled on—sometimes thinking that I was shut up in those rooms by an enemy who plotted my death, and had set these two witches upon me to murder me; sometimes fancying that Everard Lestrangle was in the next room, lurking behind the half-closed door, and watching me with malevolent eyes that gloated on my anguish.

In all this time sleep was a stranger to me. Sweet as the kiss of a long-lost friend was my first snatch of slumber—and far sweeter was my awakening.

It was dusk, and my room lighted only by the last warm glow of sunset. That stifling atmosphere which my hired nurses had kept up for the comfort of their own shrivelled bodies, by means of constant fires in the middle of May, and closed windows and doors, was exchanged for a refreshing coolness. There was a perfume of the country, too, in the air; and lifting my dim eyes, I perceived a great nosegay of wallflowers in a bowl on the little table by my bed. Never before, since I had lain there, had I been indulged with such a luxury as a flower.

The room seemed empty; neither of my attendant harridans slumbered in the capacious armchair in which one of these guardians was wont to keep her comfortable watch, while the other slept on a sofa in my sitting-room. They were at cards, perhaps, in the next room, I thought; and yet there was no light to be seen through the crack of the door. I wondered vaguely what had become of them. They were absent, yet I fancied myself not alone; an unseen presence seemed near me. At one moment I thought I heard, behind the bed-curtain, the faint rustle of a silken petticoat; but my nurse wore fusty serge only. Then my eyelids closed involuntarily, and I slept.

From this time my condition was altered from the extremity of wretchedness to supreme comfort. My nights were still, for the most part, sleepless, and my mind still wandered; but the paths in which it strayed were paths of pleasantness. What a rapturous vision was that which once, in the dead of night, beamed upon me! Methought I saw Dorothea Lestrangle watching my pillow—a trick of fancy, like all the rest, doubtless; but, oh, 'twas a sweet delusion!

The time which followed I seemed to spend betwixt sleep and waking. My delirium grew less violent, and at last ceased altogether in its wilder form, though my senses were not yet restored.

I slept for hours and days at a stretch. Exhausted nature thus renewed her strength. My beldame nurses vanished, and in their place appeared a comfortable, homely visaged matron, who fed me with as gentle hands as if I had been a sick child. I took whatever was administered to me meekly enough from this kind attendant, and grew to like her homely countenance, which at times, when my mind was astray, I took for the face of my foster-mother.

Yet there was scarce a night passed in which I was not bed-flooded by that phantom of the woman I loved hovering over my sick bed. With daylight, the sweet image vanished; and its absence, much more than the pain and langour I still suffered, made my days blank to me.

One morning, my mind being clearer than usual, I took courage to question my nurse about this vision.

"Is there any one else but you who nurses me?" I asked; and for a moment I fancied the woman looked embarrassed by my inquiry. She answered readily enough, however.

"No, sir; you have had no other nurse but me, since Nurse Helps and Nurse Flanagan were sent away."

"Who dismissed them?"

"The doctor. He found Mrs. Flanagan drunk one night, and Nurse Helps fast asleep, and so sent them both packing."

"But at night I have seen some one else at my bedside—a lady."

The nurse shook her head,

"Sick fancies, sir," she said; "your poor dear head has been wandering."

"Yes, I know I have wandered—wander still, even, at night; but this seemed a reality. I could have sworn that I saw a lady I know bending over me, with a pensive anxious face, like a compassionate angel."

"It might be an angel that you saw, Mr. Ainsleigh," the nurse answered, smiling. "You have been snatched from the very brink of the grave; and who can tell what angel may have succoured you?"

I was convinced, yet languished for night and this dear vision; but, by a strange fatality, it never visited me after those inquiries.

Not long after, I had a relapse, and for some time I was again at close quarters with death. When this new attack of fever abated, I began to mend quickly, however, and I was in very good hands.

I awoke from a long sleep one summer afternoon—it was now June—and saw my window open, and felt the balmy air upon my face. There had always been a nosegay at my bedside since that first welcome bunch of wallflowers, and to-day I beheld a great bowl of roses, the first I had seen since my return to England. While I lay staring idly at these flowers, with a childish sense of pleasure, I heard the same sound of silken stuff rustling that I had heard in the twilight on that evening when first

I missed my cruel nurses, only this time the sound was louder, and it was real.

A white hand drew back the curtain at the foot of the bed, and a sweet soft voice murmured, "Are you awake, Robin?"

It was the voice of my foster-sister Margery.

I was ungrateful enough to feel a pang of disappointment. The face looking down upon me was as fair a face as ever looked upon man, but it was not the countenance that had visited me when my mind wandered; it was not that one only face which meant all the world for me.

"Is it you, Margery?" I asked, and I fancy some disappointment was palpable in the tone of my voice. "Is it you I have seen night after night watching me?"

"Yes, dear Robin, I have been nursing you for some time. But you had been lying here ill a long while before I knew what had happened, and came to you. I had been wondering that you never came near me, and looking for you constantly of a night at the theatre, till I fancied at last you had left London. 'Twas only by accident that I heard of your duel with Sir Everard Lestrangle, just three weeks ago."

"And 'twas you, no doubt, who came to my rescue and drove away those brutal old women?"

"Nay, Robin, your doctor, Mr. Hallibury, had sent them away before I came, and good Mrs. Merle, your present nurse, was with you."

"How did you hear of the duel at last?"

"From that poor foolish Johnson, who picked up the news at a tavern. Sir Everard had fought two duels the same morning, he told me, and had slain both his antagonists, but he could not give me the names of his victims. Coupling this news with your disappearance, I took fright, and came here straight to find out the worst. Ah, Robert, thou couldst never dream what rapture it was to thy poor foster-sister to find thee living! Since that day I have only quitted you to go to the theatre at night."

After this I could hardly doubt that the figure I had seen was Margery's, and that my fancy, pre-occupied with Dora's image, had transformed it into the likeness of her I loved. Mrs. Merle's denial of any other presence than her own I took to be a sick nurse's judicious subterfuge, intended to protect me from undue excitement.

"Dear Margery," I said, touched by so much devotion, "what have I done to ~~deserve~~ your goodness? And you have acted every evening, and nursed me by night! What a burden!"

"A privilege, Robert and not a burden. But now you are getting so much better I shall very soon leave you."

After this my mind wandered no more. Slowly, almost like a child, on whom the light of reason dawns gradually, I awoke

to the realities of life, and looked back upon my strange dreams with a blush, as if they had been voluntary follies of which I had need to feel ashamed. Slowly I realized, in a hard everyday light wherein I had never looked upon it before, the insurmountable distance between myself and Dora. Again and again, before my meeting with Lestrangle, I had told myself that in the event of his death Dora and I must be for ever strangers. Yet now the duel was fought and done with, I felt as if I had lost a hope. It would at least have been something to have freed her. As it was, she was still the wife of a villain without hope of release.

In spite of my troubles, however, I felt cheered and comforted by Margery's presence. There was comfort in the thought that I was not utterly forsaken—that this generous soul cared for me. How beyond measure lonely should I have been without her friendship!

The consideration of this fact inspired me with the liveliest gratitude, and on no day did I omit to thank and bless her for her goodness to me.

"How comes it, Margery," I said upon one occasion, "that you, who are so much admired—whose head might fairly be turned by the worship of a town—should condescend to devote all these hours to me?"

"The town is a poor substitute for home and kindred, Robert!" she answered softly; "but you remind me of the first, and seem to me to stand in place of the second. As for the town—well, I will not pretend that I do not value success, I should be a sorry actress if I didn't: applause is the food we live upon. Yet, although my heart thrills at a hearty round from the pit and gallery, I have never set much value upon the praises of those fine gentlemen critics who hang about the green-room. Their compliments have always a contemptuous flavour."

"Have you heard of Sir Everard since the duel, Margery?" I asked.

She coloured crimson at the question.

"Yes, I have heard of him."

"And you have seen him, I fancy, from your face?"

"Yes, he has been behind the scenes several times. Oh, Robert, can you imagine so mean a creature? He knows how I hate him, and with what good reason. He knows that I might be an innocent happy woman but for him—for sure, innocence and happiness must go together, since guilt is such a burden. He knows this, and yet will come and whisper in my ear; and threatens to let the world know my wretched story if I repulse him."

"Scoundrel!" I cried; "when I am once up and on foot, Margery, there shall be an end of this persecution."

She sighed, and shook her head doubtfully.

"Alas, dear Robert, I know you are brave and true, and would willingly defend me from him. Yet what could you do to stop his infamy? You have been very near the loss of your life already, in the attempt to punish him."

"There is a way to protect you, Margery," I said, and then grew grave and silent, thinking of that way.

This conversation took place in the days of my convalescence. I was now strong enough to sit in an easy-chair by the open window, during the brightest hours of the summer day. My foster-sister had been nursing me several weeks, with an unvarying care and tenderness. We had been more together that time than we had ever been since those childish days when we hunted the young rabbits in Hauteville; and I had seen much to admire and respect in Margery's character—a purity untarnished even by contact with Everard Lestrangle, a candour and a generosity that could belong only to an elevated nature. Her beauty was, in my mind, the least of her gifts; and yet she was certainly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

During this period of my convalescence, which progressed slowly at the best, my devoted nurse entertained me with many a record of her adventures when she was only a strolling player; representing with admirable mimicry the strange creatures with whom she had consorted in those days, the small envyings and petty jealousies, the varieties and follies of a race who seemed to me to be a kind of overgrown children. She told me the wild delight which thrilled her soul when a London parson, a friend of Garrick, found her acting *Rosalind* in a barn, and promised to recommend her to the great actor. It was a year afterwards, when she had quite given up the idea of hearing any more of this admirer and patron, that Garrick himself saw her act *Jane Shore* at the Corn Exchange at Chelmsford, and came behind the scenes, when the play was over, to engage her.

"I walked on air that night, Robert," she said when she told me the story, "and then came an interval of sickening fear. I could scarce trust myself to sleep of a night, so agonizing were my dreams of failure. It was in *Jane Shore* I was to make my first appearance. Christmas was hardly over, and the gallery still eager for the pantomime. The other actresses told me I could not have had a worse time to appear, and that if Mr. Garrick wished me to succeed he would surely have done better for me. 'He only wants you for a stopgap, my dear,' said one friendly soul, 'because Clive is in the tantrums and has gone to the Garden. When she comes back you'll have notice to quit. You don't know the selfishness of managers.' Yet," she added with a proud smile, "*I made them hear me, and they*

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waited for their pantomime so quietly that you might have heard a pin drop while I was dying."

"I dare say this public homage is the very breath of your nostrils, Margery," I said, smiling at her enthusiasm. She shook her head, with a faint sigh.

"Nay, Robert, it is well enough, but it is not all the world."

"What!" I cried, "can you imagine a brighter world than that fairyland the theatre?"

"Not a brighter, perhaps, if by brightness you mean dazzle and fever; but a better and a happier. Oh, Robert, do you know, there are times, even now, while I am still young, and the public has not begun to tire of me—times when I feel so sadly, sadly lonely, and when all that applause from people who know nothing of me, and can scarce care whether I am living or dead, seems the hollowest thing in the world. Sometimes, in the very midst of one of my favourite characters, when the fire of the player's passion has burned strongest in me, the flame dies out all at once, and I am as cold as ice, and feel what a foolish miserable show it is, and I no better than a puppet dressed in satin and tinsel. Then I think what all my life to come is to be—the theatre, night after night, with the same dependence upon the breath of public favour; a poor paid slave at best, and the constant dread of that day when the town will grow weary of me gnawing at my empty heart. And when I grow old, Robert—and how stealthily will age creep on—"

"You will have made a great fortune by that time, Margery, and can have your villa at Hampton, like Garrick, or a pretty rustic cottage like that of Mrs. Clive's which you told me about, next door to Horace Walpole's toy castle."

"A villa or a cottage, Robert, can make little difference to old age and loneliness."

"But why must your age needs be lonely, dear Margery? Do you think that, at five-and-twenty, with beauty, fame, and a public career, the story of your life is finished? You will live to be an honoured and happy wife, dear sister, and that remote old age you talk of will be cheered and lightened by the love of children."

Her brow clouded suddenly with a look that was almost severe.

"Never, Robert!" she said gravely. "Never! Do you forget who and what I am? His cast-off mistress! Do you think I shall ever forget those words? His cast-off mistress! If ever in some triumph of the hour I do just for a moment forget that bitter past, I can speedily recollect myself by recalling your words that night. What honest man would marry me, knowing my story? Or if there were any man weak enough or base enough to do it, do you think I would suffer him to stoop so low? No, Robert, the story of my life ended seven years ago. I shall live and die alone."

There was a tragic power, a depth of feeling in her looks and tones, that gave her speech a double significance. I felt that every word was real. This humility of spirit—this sense of a degradation too deep to be blotted out by years of remorse—was no womanly device to charm a lover, or apologize for a fault.

I remembered the days when Margery and I sat side by side on a little wooden stool in the chimney corner, and when I used to swear that she and no other should be my wife. I remembered our fond childish dreams of a hut in the rabbit-warren, furnished with a provision of beech-nuts and withered apple, which were to serve for our sustenance. I remembered the time when Margery's was for me the one bright face in this world.

I had loved another since then—loved honestly, faithfully, devotedly, and in vain. No star of hope shone upon my dark horizon. The woman I loved was divided from me for ever. And what was my life worth to me that I should hesitate to bestow it in payment of a debt of gratitude? This faithful girl was the one only friend who had come to me in my desolation; and if she still loved me—as I was at times inclined to suspect—if she needed an honest man's arm to defend her from a profligate—should I be cold enough to leave her lonely?

There was silence between us for a little while. Margery stood by the open window, with her round white arms folded on the broad wooden sill, and the summer breeze lifting the loose tresses from her brow. It was sunset, and the rosy western light shone on her face as she looked far away towards the open country. Her eyes had a dreaming look. The sweet lower lip, which, like Sophia Weston's, pouted a little, as if a bee had stung it newly, drooped now with a sorrowful expression. She was a thorough woman. Renown, fortune, the most brilliant life that woman ever lived, were not enough to satisfy that vague yearning of an empty heart.

Brief as our silence was, I had thought earnestly before I broke it.

"Suppose, Margery," I began at last, "there were a man who knew your story from the first page to the last—knew how your rustic innocence was betrayed by a villain—knew all—and yet could esteem and honour you as one of the best and purest among women. Suppose there were such an one, Margery, and he were able to offer you, not the fervid passion of a heart that has never loved—alas! his was wounded to death years ago, and can never beat again but with a sober affection—but at least the respect and regard which has served for the happiness of many households. Nay, my dear, why beat about the bush? You know that it is of myself I speak. It is but a poor offer to make you, Margery, from one who has little to give, but it comes straight from a fond and grateful heart."

She stood motionless while I spoke, but at my last words covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, Robert," she cried, "for God's sake, do not tempt me!"

"A sorry temptation, Margery," I said; "I offer you a husband whose whole stock of worldly wealth is something less than three thousand pounds, and who can scarce hope better than at sixty to be a major in the East India Company's service."

"Robert, don't tempt me," she repeated piteously. "No, no. I meant what I said just now. If any man were weak enough to forget my position, these lips should remind him of it. Your wife, Robert? No! A thousand times no. Alas! dear friend, do I not know your story, and where your heart was given? Let us be friends, and friends only. It will be happier for both of us. Yes, Robert, much happier. I love you too well to accept anything less than your heart."

I need not record the precise words in which I persuaded her to set aside this decision. Her humility had touched me more deeply than I can express—gratitude, memory of the past, compassion, every tender sentiment *except* love, prompted the step which I now pledged myself to take—and thus moved by the impulse of the hour, I relinquished my liberty, and of my own free will accepted that very position into which it had been Everard Lestrangle's worst infamy to endeavour to entrap me!

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### I BEGIN LIFE ON A NEW PLAN.

I BELIEVE that in our strange courtship Margery was happy—with a subdued sense of joy and satisfaction which betrayed itself in no exuberance of spirits. Her happiness seemed rather an inward light, which brightened her beautiful countenance with a sweet calm radiance. My recovery, even when I had left my bed, was slow, and for a long time after that summer evening, upon which Margery and I had plighted our troth, I was still upon the sick list. The dear girl was as constantly with me as her engagements at the theatre would permit, and on those evenings when she was not in the playbill, we drove together into the suburbs, in a light open carriage, hired from a stable near Blackfriars Bridge. We felt ourselves quite alone in the world, and were neither of us bound by any of those unwritten laws which in other circles might have hindered so free an intercourse. Yet, by a strange caprice, Margery entreated that our engagement might be kept a secret from the people at the theatre.

"There are malicious souls among them," she said. "Who knows what mischief they might plot between us?"

"Nay, Madge, that is not possible."

"Sure, Robert, you do not know what is possible to malice. Let us keep our secret to ourselves. That night you came to my room at the theatre, I told my dresser you were my brother.

It was all over the theatre next morning that Mrs. Hunter had a brother come home from India. No one but that jealous Johnson ever suspected you to be any one else."

"Let him know me in my true character, Margery, and put an end to his jealousy."

"No, Robert," she said, with a pretty tyrannical air which she had learned to assume of late, and which became her infinitely. I suspect it comes natural to every woman in this position. "No, Robert, I will have no vulgar broil between you and Johnson. Believe me, you are best away from the theatre and all that belong to it. I daresay actors and actresses have no worse vices than other people—and we know they have virtues that are all their own—but it is hard work to get on with them."

"And Sir Everard Lestrangle, Margery—has that villain ceased to torment you?" I asked suspiciously, doubtful that she had some motive, some womanly fear for my own safety, in keeping me away from the theatre.

"He has been in Paris for the last six weeks, Robin. We are happily rid of him."

"Is that the truth, Margery?"

"What, sir!" she cried, flashing out at me with that pretty petulance of hers, "do you imagine I would tell you a lie?"

"Women are such cowards, my dear—for those they love."

"And Heaven knows how well I love you, Robin," she answered softly.

"Then you must humour my fancies a little more, Margery. I want to be initiated in the mysteries of your life behind the scenes."

"You shall come to the green-room some night, Robert, when you are quite well," she answered, coaxingly, and I was fain to be content.

Was I happy in this gentle bondage, and did the contemplation of this new life grow sweeter to me as the time that was to make Margery my wife drew nearer? Alas! no; for me to love once had been to love for ever. My thoughts by day my dreams by night, still hovered round the old shrine. I felt like those low-caste Indians who, when they worship their god, deposit their offering, by prescriptive right, on a stone outside the temple, and never venture to cross the threshold. So, with me, my tribute of tender regrets, my sacrifice of pain, could only be laid at the door of the sacred place that held my goddess. Yet, if I was not in love with my plighted wife, I did not do her so great a wrong as to regret the step I had taken that summer night, when her lonely situation awakened my pity, and her devotion to myself challenged my gratitude. I think, were the histories of many peaceful unions discovered, they would be found based upon no warmer attachment than that which bound me to Margery. There are few men of so ascetic a temper as to go down to the grave lonely and childless because the bright par-

ticular star of their worship shines in a heaven beyond their reach. A man will cherish the dear image of his first love till the hour of death, yet be an affectionate husband to another woman, and a fond father to her children. I believe your confirmed bachelor is rarely a disappointed lover—the man who loves passionately in his youth is of too tender a disposition to escape from some entanglement in his manhood—but rather a fellow of so cold a nature that he has never truly loved at all, and who, after a youth of trifling pleasures, glides into an age of comfortable selfishness.

It was of course agreed between us that Margery would bid farewell to the stage for ever, before our wedding-day. She would surrender all the delights and triumphs of her art to become the wife of an obscure lieutenant in the Company's service. She, the cynosure of the town, would let the curtain fall for ever on her glory, and resign all the profits and raptures of success, to follow the precarious fortunes of a soldier, in a strange country, among a barbarous people, in peril and uncertainty of every kind.

Again and again I asked her if she had weighed the sacrifice she was going to make for me.

"Consider, dearest girl," I said, "how much you give up, and how little I can bestow upon you in exchange for all you lose. More than once you have described to me the delicious intoxication of your art—the thrilling delight of those nights of triumph when the theatre rings with your name. Do you not think the nights will seem blank and empty in Bengal?"

"I shall be with you, Robin, and Bengal will be home."

"A cheerless home, dear, and with many drawbacks. My short experience of India has taught me to consider it a land of hidden perils. It is not alone the cobra that may lurk in a corner of the chamber where your children are at play, Madge, or the tiger that may steal into your compound at sundown. There are enemies more fatal—the men whom we trust."

"I will face them all, Robin, by your side," she answered, with a bright, fearless look.

"You fancy the life will be romantic, perhaps—an existence of excitement and adventure. Put that out of your thoughts. Life in India is dulness and monotony itself."

"Have I ever seemed dull with you, Robin?"

"And some day, when your regrets for your lost glories are keenest, there may come, perchance, a bitter awakening, and you will discover that your preference for me was but a childish day-dream—a girl's fond, foolish fancy."

"I think I begin to understand you, Mr. Ainsleigh," she exclaimed indignantly; "you repent having done me the honour to offer me your hand, and these arguments are designed to secure your escape. There is no occasion for any such round-about method. You are free as air, sir!"

What could I do but protest that such a notion was foreign to my thoughts, that I was most happy in the security of her affection? And, indeed, I could but feel proud of a devotion which I deserved so ill; and in my prayers at this period of my life, I rarely omitted to supplicate that I might be able to requite Margery's generous attachment with an affection as unalloyed as her own.

After this conversation I ceased for ever to torment her with doubts and objections, and our courtship went all the more smoothly for my prudence. I let her see that I valued her love and revered herself, and I think from this time forward she was entirely happy in my society.

We were to be married late in the autumn, by which time my leave of absence would have expired, and I should return to India an officer in the Company's service. My pay in this capacity would hardly have allowed me so expensive a luxury as a wife; but after all expenses of my illness were paid—the last nurse, Mrs. Merle, was singularly moderate in her charges, while the lags who preceded her made up for their wretched service by the exorbitance of their demands—I had still two thousand five hundred pounds remaining of the three thousand I received when I left Bengal. I had thus a fair fortune in ready money to start with—and I knew that Margery was rich. I considered that, before my own funds could be exhausted, I should in all probability have risen in my regiment, while in the Indian service there were brilliant chances of reward from plundered palaces and confiscated treasuries.

As soon as I was able to travel, I proposed going down to Berkshire to see my foster-father. My lips alone should tell him the story of his daughter's life; and I entertained no doubt of winning his forgiveness and esteem for the only child he had once loved so fondly.

"I shall bring him to you a proud and happy man, Margery!" I said; "and he shall give us his blessing on our wedding-day."

"I think he will scarce refuse to forgive when you plead for me, Robin," she answered with that pathetic look she wore always when speaking of her father. And then with a sudden anxiety she exclaimed,—"You will not stay long away, Robin?"

"Nay, dear, I will be as brief as a traveller can be. But I must stop a few hours with poor old Anthony Grimshaw. It will be my last visit to Hauteville before I leave England, and certainly the last time I can hope to look upon that once friendly face."

"Oh, Robin," she cried, clasping her hands, "I beseech you to come quickly back to me!"

"My dearest, why be anxious about so short a journey?"

"You are going amongst enemies. That Grimshaw woman hates you."

"Her hatred can hurt me no further."

"How can you know that? And who knows but that Sir Everard Lestrangle may get news of your visit through her, if you wait long enough to give her the opportunity of communicating with him, and may try to do you a mischief?"

"Nay, Madge, Sir Everard Lestrangle and I have done with each other. Malicious as he is, what ill-will can he bear against a wretch whom he has worsted in everything? Friends—fortune—wife—he has taken all from me, and is too triumphant to feel any sentiment but scorn on my behalf."

"Your wife, yes," she answered, with a touch of bitterness; "that was the wrong that stung deepest."

"It did, Margery, but it is a very old wound. There is only the cicatrice left. I have no fear of Lestrangle, Madge, except where you are concerned; and you told me he was in Paris."

"That was the last I heard of him from Johnson, who makes it his business to be informed of that gentleman's movements. But he may be in England,—at Hauteville, for aught I know to the contrary."

"That is hardly likely, dear. He has no passion for the place. But let me meet him where I may, I have no fear of him, and should indeed be heartily glad of any chance that might arise of a new reckoning between us."

"Just what I feared," cried Margery; "there would be a quarrel between you, and this time he would make his revenge sure. Rely upon it, 'tis a bitter regret to him to have failed when last you met."

"He is a villain, Madge, and I doubt not will come to a villainous end; but be assured that he has ceased to trouble himself about me; nor am I likely to give Mrs. Grimshaw time to communicate the news of my appearance at Hauteville to him. Indeed, if you are really anxious upon the subject, I promise you that my stay in Berkshire shall not exceed twenty-four hours."

"Promise me that, dear Robert, and you will take a weight off my heart. You will carry your pistols with you, of course?"

"I will provide myself against the possibility of highwaymen if you desire it, my dear."

"And this Indian dagger, Robert, you might wear that in your breast."

This she said standing on tip-toe to reach a weapon I had arranged with three or four others above the mantelpiece.

It was at my own rooms this conversation took place. September had begun, and the days were damp and chill, so Margery had ordered my laundress to keep fires in both rooms, and we were standing by the hearth as we talked.

The dagger which she handed me was a gift from Mr. Holwell—a slim, sharp blade of damascened steel, rapier-shaped, with a massive silver hilt; a dagger which was said to have belonged to

the Emperor Jehangeer. The weapon seemed less formidable than it really was, for half the blade was sheathed in the hilt, and only flew out on the pressure of a spring artfully hidden in the silversmith's work. I had shown the toy to Margery one idle afternoon, and had told her its history.

"You will wear this, Robin?" she said pleadingly.

"My dear child, one would suppose we lived in the middle ages, or were Venetian citizens in the days when secret denunciations were slipped into the lion's mouth. But, if it pleases you, I will put the toy in my pocket."

"Do, dear Robin. You know not what snare may be laid for you. 'Tis the first time you will have gone far from home since your meeting with that man."

I laughed at her womanish fears, and rallied her into better spirits.

This occurred on the day before my journey, and on a Sunday. Margery and I had been to the Temple Church together, and had returned to Brick Court for a glass of madeira and a biscuit after the service.

I was to sup with her that evening at her lodgings, and start next morning at daybreak by the "Velocity" coach for War borough.

"These dear Sundays have been so sweet to me, Robin," the fond creature said, as she sat sipping her wine, of which she consumed about as much as a robin might have done; "no theatre, no crowd, no noise and bustle, only you. A long day and a long evening together—long to look forward to, that is to say, Robin, but, oh, so swift to pass!"

And then she repeated a question which she had of late grown very fond of asking me,—

"Oh, Robert, are you sure you love me?"

How could I answer so tender an inquiry, propounded with such bewitching humility by lips as lovely as ever spoke to man? What could I do but assure her of my devotion, declaring that not to adore her would be to confess myself a wretch unworthy the name of man.

"And you have forgotten the past, Robin, and are happy?" she asked.

"I am quite happy, dearest."

She gave a little sigh of relief, and turned to me with a radiant smile.

"Why, then, I will be quite happy too, Robert," she said, "and bid a truce to all those petty agonies of jealousy—jealousy of the past—of the future—of I know not what—which have consumed my heart."

We supped together gaily at nine o'clock that evening. Margery had made quite a feast in my honour, and the champagne sparkled merrily in our glasses. We were lingering over the meal.



and I was repeating some of those Indian adventures which this kind soul seemed never to weary of—and to which she would listen, breathless, with her lips apart, and her eyes fixed, and full of a awful wonder, as if she could see the scenes I described to her. I was in the midst of a description when we were startled by a tremendous knock on the street door, and then a man's voice below.

"Sure I know that voice," cried Madge, starting up from the table, and going over to the door, which she opened a little way, softly. "Yes, I thought as much. It is that foolish fellow, Johnson. He is prompter, as you know, and it is his duty to bring me news of any change in the business—or the rehearsals. I have given him a supper, sometimes, Robert, for he was kind to me when I was poor, and his salary is hardly enough to keep him and the bedridden mother that lives with him. We vagabonds are fond of our kindred, you see, Robert. I daresay he observed the lights, and fancied I had company."

Her woman came in at this moment. "Mr. Johnson is below, madam, and begs to see you on important business."

"Important business! I suppose the rehearsal to-morrow morning is to be half an hour earlier than Saturday's call."

"Let him come in Madge," I said; "'tis a simple, harmless creature. I shall not be jealous of him."

"No—but he may take it into his poor addled brain to be jealous of you. Ask him to walk upstairs, Sally—and put clean plates and a knife and fork at that end of the table. And bring another bottle of champagne." She resumed her seat with a little sigh of resignation.

"I fear he will worry you to death, Robert," she said; "there never was a more egotistical creature."

She had scarce spoken when the gentleman was announced. He came into the room with that Congreve and Wycherly swagger which resembles the bearing of no human creature, except a third-rate actor—his elbow rounded, his left hand resting lightly on his hip—a thing of flourishes and attitudes. His plum-coloured cloth suit was threadbare, and brushed to attenuation; his stockings were silk, but yellow with long usage and much washing, ornamented with more than one specimen of that kind of dilapidation which is I believe called a Jacob's ladder; but as a set-off against this too apparent decay, he sported a Ramlies cravat of cheap new lace, with a tinsel brooch in it; a pair of paste shoe-buckles; ruffles, which half-covered his skinny hands; a freshly-powdered toupet; and a court-sword, with a cut steel hilt.

He saluted me stiffly, and regarded my presence with evident dissatisfaction, but seemed not ill-pleased to take a seat at the supper-table to which Margery hospitably invited him. But even this invitation he accepted with a somewhat lofty air, as

of a man to whom champagne and chicken were matters of daily occurrence.

"Since you are so pressing," he said, "I will amuse myself with a wing while I inform you what brought me here. I should not have intruded upon you on a Sunday evening, and when, as your woman told me, you had company, except upon business. There is a change in the performance to-morrow night."

"Indeed."

"Yes; *Lear* is withdrawn. The great little man"—this with a scornful laugh—"is ill, or perhaps finds the season dull, and the audience languid. Why, his *Lear* is no original conception, sir, but a slavish copy from the life founded upon some poor wretch of a tradesman in Hatton Garden, whose favourite grandchild fell out of a window while he was playing with her and was killed upon the spot, and who, being driven mad by the catastrophe, used to sit and mope at a window where our friend David saw him. The performance is a mere piece of Dutch painting, as low in art as that faithful reproduction of pots and pans which your connoisseur pretends to admire in the Flemish school. And this is the genius which the town runs mad about—or rather, which the public has been talked into admiring by a little knot of dilettanti!"

"I have no doubt, sir, that had you an opening, you would astonish the town with some new ideas," I said politely.

"Sir," he replied, with a solemn air, after tossing off a tumbler of champagne by way of preliminary,—“sir, 'tis but a groveling notion of tragedy which will copy the madness of a king from a distraught tradesman in Hatton Garden. My *Lear* soars into the region of the ideal. It is above the heads of the vulgar crowd—so far above them, indeed, that in a temporary theatre at Stockton-upon-Tees, where the populace is ignorant as dirt, I was pelted—yes, sir, pelted. I did not heed their missiles. I felt like St. Stephen—the St. Stephen of dramatic art; and I think, sir, as I gazed upwards to the gallery at the close of the performance, amidst a shower of heterogeneous objects, from oyster-shells to orange-peel, my countenance must have been illumined by some ray of that intellectual lustre which in the saint became transfiguration. I hope there is no blasphemy, sir, in the comparison which has occurred to me more than once when reflecting upon that passage in my life.”

"You have not acted *Lear* in London, Mr. Johnson?" I inquired. He shook his head with a tremendous significance.

"No, sir, David knows better than to allow that. His version of that sublime character goes down well enough with a public that has been surfeited with the mannerisms of Quin and Betterton. But once let in upon them the light of a loftier conception, and David's little candle would be extinguished for ever. He is wise in his generation, sir, and knows that. Why, I have

a reading of *Richard the Third*, sir, which the man who calls himself my master in his most inspired moment never dreamt of."

The poor, half-demented creature rambled on in this way for an hour, and still Margery pressed meat and drink upon him. He ate the best part of a chicken, and emptied the champagne bottle which had been opened expressly for him; and by the time he came to his last glass, betrayed an excitement which, in so weak-brained a being, was near akin to lunacy.

"You think that I shall never push my way to the front, I dare swear, Mrs. Hunter," he said, growing suddenly affronted with Margery, who had been betrayed into a smile during one of his rhapsodies. "I saw you laugh just now, and I have heard that you sided with Mr. Garrick in making a joke of me the other night in the green-room. You think that Garrick can crush me for ever. You are mistaken, madam. There is a kind of fire that will not be damped so easily. It smoulders, madam—it smoulders—and will some day burst into flame. The world shall hear of me—ay, Mrs. Hunter, it shall hear—even if it be as it heard of him who fired the Ephesian dome. And who knows if the so-called madman who did that work of destruction was not one who could have built as splendid a temple as that which he annihilated, if he had had the chance? I tell you, madam, if I cannot build, I will destroy. I will not perish unknown. What is that the Latin poet says—'If the gods of heaven will not help me, why, then, I will move Acheron itself to compass my desire.'"

He had risen on finishing his supper, and was now pacing the room as he talked. Margery tried to soothe him.

"Nay, Mr. Johnson," she said, "why make yourself unhappy because you have not the first rank? You are twice as well off as in the days when you and I were strolling players. It is not to be imagined that the manager of Drury Lane will descend from his throne in order to bid you mount in his place."

"In money, perhaps, madam. In reputation I am a much poorer man. Then at least I had sometimes the chance of shining in a leading character—though even in a barn I was envied and plotted against. Now the most I am entrusted with is some third-rate walking gentleman in a comedy, or a gray-haired twaddling father that does not appear till the fifth act."

After stalking to and fro for some time in this fashion, his wan face flushed with wine, and his eyes glaring with excitement, he turned upon Margery with a sudden fierceness and exclaimed,—

"So, madam, your admirer is in town?"

She started, and looked at me; then recovering herself quickly, said,—

"Which admirer, Mr. Johnson? I hope I have several among the public who come to see me act."

"What, madam, you pretend not to understand me! You affect to be ignorant of his return——"

"Mr. Johnson," I said, interrupting him, "this is not a tone in which I am accustomed to hear that lady addressed. I must beg you to moderate your excitement."

"Sir," cried this poor half-distraught creature, "I take my orders from no man. No, sir, not from you, however nearly related you may be to Mrs. Hunter. But the lady knows, if my heart's blood would purchase her the gratification of a moment, I would freely shed it, to the last drop."

He wiped away a tear or two, with a somewhat maudlin air, flourishing a ragged handkerchief which had evidently been employed in its better days in the tragedy of *Othello*, for I observed that there were strawberries worked upon it in red cotton.

"She knows that, sir," he went on, "or she knows nothing of me. The admirer of whom I speak is that reprobate who has made his pursuit of Mrs. Hunter notorious to half the town—who is even said to have laid a wager with one of his boon companions that he will make her his mistress."

"Is Everard Lestrangle in London?" I inquired eagerly.

"I have it upon excellent authority, sir, that he was seen last night going into a club-house in Pall Mall, where it is one of his amiable customs to play whist for a dozen hours at a stretch. Indeed, I have heard of his being discovered with his companions in the morning sitting knee-deep in pasteboard."

I looked at Margery, and in that moment resolved to defer my journey to Hauteville, in order to remain at hand to protect her from this scoundrel.

"The insolence of this person, sir," I said to Mr. Johnson, "is a kind of insult to which Mrs. Hunter's public life unfortunately exposes her. Sir Everard will find, however, that he will not be permitted to annoy her with impunity."

The actor laughed scornfully.

"What! sir," he exclaimed, "do you suppose that the gentleman would stop to fight you? I have challenged him three times, and have been denied the right of satisfaction with actual contumely."

"I daresay I might find a way of redress, sir."

"Ay, sir. There are methods of redress for a man who holds his life cheaply; and let Sir Everard Lestrangle beware of such an one."

"Nay, my good friends," cried Margery, "this is much ado about nothing. Sir Everard can do me no harm. He did for some time persecute me with letters, and even costly presents, which he caused to be sent to my lodgings; but, as I returned the letters unopened, and sent back his gifts as fast as they came, he at last desisted. The worst thing he has done has been to speak ill of me; and, as he happens to be a notorious

liar, the world has been kind enough to disbelieve him on this occasion."

Mr. Johnson looked at her suspiciously.

"I dare swear," he said, "this kind of pursuit, discreditable as it may be, is pleasing to the vanity of a woman."

"Mrs. Hunter is not the kind of woman to be gratified by such incense," I said, sternly; and then, looking at my watch, proposed that, as it was near midnight, we should both take leave of our hostess.

"I have a few words to say to you in private, Margery," I said; "so, with your permission, will stay five minutes later than Mr. Johnson."

The wretched man glared at me savagely, jealousy gnawing his vitals; but, as Margery put her hand into his, and wished him good-night in a somewhat imperative manner, he was fain to retire.

"You did not tell me what the play was to be to-morrow night," she said, when he was at the door.

"'Tis not yet decided; but it will be *Douglas* or *Jane Shore*, I daresay. I will bring you word at noon to-morrow," he answered, with an offended air, and then left the room without honouring me with a salute.

As soon as this gentleman was departed, I told Margery that, as Sir Everard was in town, I would defer my visit to Hauteville until after our marriage, which event we could hasten by some weeks; and instead of bringing Jack Hawker up to London, to be reconciled to his daughter, I could carry Margery down to the cottage as my wife.

"I want to secure the best right to defend you from that villain, Madge," I said.

"What! Robert," she cried, bitterly, "and do you think his malicious soul will not rejoice when he hears of our marriage—rejoice to know that you have, of your own accord, taken the position he tried to force upon you?"

"Nay, Margery," I replied, "you undervalue yourself strangely. Time has altered the aspect of the situation. The marriage into which he entrapped me was an union with a simple country girl—not the cynosure of the town. He has fallen in love with you a second time, Madge, and rely upon it, the passion of his mature age is more desperate than the fancy of his youth. He will be mad when he hears of our marriage."

Anxious, however, as Margery had been upon the subject of my journey to Berkshire, she was, with feminine inconsistency, disinclined to permit me to forego it. Again and again she assured me that it was impossible she could suffer any inconvenience from Sir Everard's presence in London.

"As to our marriage taking place any sooner than we arranged, Robert, that is quite impossible," she said. "I must

finish the season with Mr. Garrick, who has been very good to me, and whom I would not disappoint on any account. Nor will I ever appear before the public as your wife; and I have set my heart upon my father being present at my wedding. Oh, Robin, that word marriage has been such a mockery for me! I want, for once, to be married like an honest woman."

The words smote me to the heart, and for a moment I could scarcely answer her. And she was my chosen wife after all—the woman I spurned seven years ago.

Perceiving that she was really bent upon my seeing her father without delay, I consented, somewhat unwillingly, to start next morning, as I had arranged, resolving, at the same time, to make my absence as brief as possible. So I wished this dear soul good-bye and left her, full of anxiety about me. She accompanied me to the street-door, and hung about me fondly, entreating that I would be careful.

"You are not very strong yet awhile, Robin," she said, "and the mornings and evenings are so cold. Be sure you keep the coach-window shut on your side, and do not walk too far."

I kissed her, and pledged myself to take especial charge of so precious a being as Mr. Robert Ainsleigh.

"Upon my honour, Madge," I said, half laughing at her carefulness, "I do not believe there is a man upon this earth worthy of a true woman's love. There is no creature but an infant pure enough to deserve so sublime an affection." On which she broke out into a tender panegyric of her humble servant, which would have made the vainest man blush for his unworthiness.

I had not gone far before I discovered that I had left Jehangier's famous dagger behind me. I now remembered that I had taken it from my pocket in the course of the evening, when showing Margery some papers, and had laid it upon a little tea-table in one of the windows. I would not, however, return for it, at the risk of disturbing the house, since I had only consented to carry the thing about me in deference to a whim of Margery's, and for my own part looked upon the weapon as an encumbrance, of which accident had happily rid me.

"Poor Madge will be vexed when she finds it," I said to myself, "but she will know that I have my pistols."

## CHAPTER XL.

### IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

I STARTED for Warborough at daybreak next morning, inside the coach—a mode of travelling which I detested, and with the window up, in compliance with my kind mistress's injunction. While the coach stood in the yard of the inn, I was somewhat puzzled by the appearance of a man whose countenance seemed strangely familiar to me, yet whose identity I could not discover

He was a short, stunted-looking man, broad across the shoulders, which were bent as if with habitual stooping, but somewhat shrivelled about the legs. He wore an iron-gray beard which concealed the lower part of his face, and, in conjunction with his hooked nose, gave him a somewhat Jewish aspect; and he was muffled to the chin in a long overcoat and woollen neckerchief. He carried a wooden case, slung to his shoulder, and I set him down at once as a Jew pedlar, and was all the more mystified by that vivid sensation of having seen him before, as I had never had any dealings with that confraternity. This gentleman mounted the coach and took his seat on the roof, while I was wondering about him.

The day was cold and dull, and I had no especial reason to regret my promise to ride inside. It was four in the afternoon when we reached WarLorough, after stopping to dine on the road. I looked at dinner for my Israelitish pedlar, but he did not show himself in the room where we dined, and I had no further opportunity of making up my mind as to whether I had or had not seen him before. It was an insignificant question to occupy my attention, but in the enforced idleness of the journey I had found myself dwelling upon it with ridiculous persistency, coming back after the most serious thoughts to the repeated inquiry, "Where have I seen that fellow?"

Remembering Margery's injunctions that I was not to fatigue myself, and being anxious to make the shortest work of my business in Berkshire, I hired a vehicle at the "George" to take me over to Hauteville without delay, and drove straight to the cottage, where I was lucky enough to find honest Jack and his wife at home.

I had prepared myself carefully for this meeting, and had arranged my plan of action after considerable deliberation.

I had thought at first of telling John Hawker the simple truth about his daughter's story, suppressing no painful passage in her life, and trusting in the might of a father's tenderness for a free pardon. But on thinking over the business, I remembered what my foster-mother had said about her home at Hauteville, and how hard a thing it would seem to her to leave it. To reveal Everard Lestrangle as the seducer of her child would be inevitably to banish her from that simple paradise. Again, the more I dwelt upon the story of that dear soul who was so soon to be my wife, the more morbidly did I shrink from telling it. The knowledge that these things had been was torture to me: as the time drew near, it seemed to me that my lips must needs refuse to shape the words that would reveal them. And thus, after much painful consideration, I hit upon a story which would account satisfactorily for Margery's flight, and yet contain in it very little that should not be true.

Jack Hawker and his wife were seated at supper when the

postchaise which had brought me from Warborough drew up at the cottage. I saw them through the unshrouded casement seated at a little table in the fire-lit room. My foster-mother rose with a cry of surprise as I opened the door and walked straight into the kitchen, or living-room, where my infancy had been spent. How familiar and how cheery the old open fireplace looked, with a patchwork-covered arm-chair on one side, and an old oaken settle upon which I had been wont to clamber, on the other! There was no light except that of the fire, but the logs were blazing merrily, and I could see every wrinkle in my foster-father's honest rugged countenance.

He rose and stared at me, puzzled for one moment only, recognizing me in the next.

"Wife," he cried, "'tis Robin—the child you suckled, that turned against us, and stole my darter! Thou'rt a bold villain, Robert Ainsleigh, to show thy face here."

"Do you remember what I told you more than seven years ago, Jack Hawker?" I answered. "I told you that I was innocent of wrong to your daughter, and that the day would come that should justify me. Do you think, if I were the villain you call me, that I should come here, having no motive to serve by coming? I have come to give you back your daughter."

"What!" he cried, looking towards the door, and with an expression that was half terror, half eagerness, "have you brought her with you in that coach? I'll not see her, the shameful hussey! I'll not see her. Let her keep out of her father's way. She's wrung my heart sore enough these seven years. I won't be shamed by the sight of her."

"Not so fast, Jack," I said; "Margery is in London, where she is one of the greatest women of the day."

"How is that?" cried he; "has some rich fool married her for the love of her pretty face? I've heard of such things, and that the way of shame has been the road to fortune for some women."

"No, Jack, she has made no rich marriage; she is a widow, and lives by her own industry. When she ran away from here, it was to marry an adventurer—a man called Hay—who died the other day in India, years after he had deserted her—left her to starve."

"A man called Hay!" cried Mr. Hawker. "I know of no such fellow. There was never any man of that name within twenty mile of here."

"I cannot explain that. I only know that your daughter was married to Mr. Philip Hay, and that she has the certificate of her marriage ready to show you, if you cannot believe my word."

"Believe thee, Robin!" he said, with a touch of his old tenderness, "there was a time when I loved thee. But who was this Hay, and how came my girl to fall in love with him?" x



"The man was an adventurer, as I have told you, and the story is a sad one. Let it rest, for the present at least. Your daughter was legally united to this Mr. Hay, and afterwards deserted in London, where, being alone and penniless, she happened to fall in with a humble friend, who put her into the way of earning an honest living as an actress in a small country theatre."

"An actress!" cried Jack, amazed; "do you mean a stage-player? What, John Hawker's daughter strutting in a booth at Bartlemy fair?"

"Not at Bartlemy fair, Jack, but in the grandest theatre in London—Garrick's theatre—where she shines like a queen. Your daughter is a genius, Jack. The noblest women in town would take her by the hand if she would let them. She is honoured and respected by every one who knows her."

"A genius!" cried Jack, with a bitter laugh. "That's something genteel, isn't it? But didn't you tell me she's a stage-player?—with a painted face, I'll warrant, like those trollops I've seen at Warborough fair."

"She is one of the most beautiful as well as the most talented of women," I answered, "and I have come here to tell you that she has done me the honour to promise to become my wife."

"What! you are going to marry her? Is that the end of it? After this cock-and-a-bull story about some Mr. Hay. Come, Robin, wouldn't it be honester to tell thy poor old foster-father the plain truth? Thou didst steal the girl away, and after all these years thou art sorry, and ashamed of thy folly, and wouldst fain make an honest woman of her. Speak the truth, Bob; 'tis the straightest, easiest way."

"I told you the truth, Jack, that evening at the great house, when you refused to shake hands with me. I had neither act nor part in Margery's running away. Nor have I had any part in her history from that hour until the last two or three months. I have been in India seven years, and have come back on officer in the Company's service, with a humble fortune of my own winning, which your daughter has generously consented to share with me."

Jack Hawker rubbed his shaggy head with an air of sore bewilderment.

"Plague take me if I can make it out," he said; "'tis the queerest story—and yet, Bob, I'm minded to think thou'rt an honest man—and I should like to see the lass thy wife. But a stage-player, with raddled cheeks—that's a hard pill to stomach, Robin;" and the gamekeeper made a wry face, as if the very thought of Margery's profession was nauseous.

"Come to London and see her Jack," I said, "and you'll bow down and worship your own daughter." And then after a little more talk, and as much explanation as I could venture to give.

there came perfect reconciliation. Jack wrung my hands, protesting he had always loved me like a son.

"Ay, Bob, that night I refused thy hand, it went through my heart like a knife," he said, smiling at me, with tears in his honest eyes. "What a fine fellow thee art grown, to be sure—as brown as a berry! And thee hast been in India—all among the blacks?"

My foster-mother was delighted. She had stood by crying in her apron while matters seemed doubtful, but fell upon her husband's neck and kissed him when he melted.

"He speaks the truth, Jack," she said. "Our girl is as beautiful as an angel, and her heart is as true to us as when she was a babe in her cradle."

"What!" roared the injured husband, "hast thee seen her?"

"Yes, Jack, we've managed to meet unbeknown to thee, now and again, on market-days."

Jack was silent for a few moments, looking down thoughtfully.

"Well," he growled at last, "I'd rather hear you've both deceived me than that she should go on for years and never take the trouble to come anigh us."

They insisted upon my sitting down to supper with them, and I was in no humour to refuse, and made believe to eat some cold bacon-dumpling, and drink Mr. Hawker's small beer, with as much relish as in the days when this was my home, and to sup with mammy and daddy at nightfall the highest earthly distinction I knew. Jack and his wife asked me innumerable questions about myself, and about my own adventures, in relating which I took care to avoid all mention of Sir Everard Lestrangle. I suffered Jack Hawker even to suppose that I had gone to India of my own free will, from a pure spirit of adventure.

"Thou'lt send away the post-shay, Robin, and lie here for to-night, at least," said my foster-mother, awakened to the consciousness of my chariot by an impatient snort from one of the horses.

They both pressed me to occupy their second chamber, as I having no reason for refusing the friendly offer, I consented, and went out to dismiss the chaise, while my foster-mother went upstairs to light a fire and air the little room, which was not often tenanted.

I paid the postilion, and told him to fetch me in his chaise next day in time for the afternoon coach to London.

"There's no coach leaves Warborough in the afternoon," he said; "but there's one at seven in the evening. If I come for you at five, that'll be time enough and to spare."

He promised to be punctual and then drove away. I turned to go back to the cottage, and as I did so caught sight of a figure lurking behind the elder bushes that made a tall hedge on one side of the little garden. There was something furtive in the manner

of this figure that roused my suspicions. My Indian experiences had made me quick to suspect a spy in any unauthorized loiterer.

"Hullo!" I shouted, "what do you want there?"

Instead of answering, the man darted round the angle of the hedge and vanished. I followed, but the wood was thick behind Jack Hawker's garden, and the night dark. The man was out of sight.

I stopped at the edge of the wood and listened, but could not hear so much as the crackle of a withered leaf.

"If the scoundrel is a spy, he is used to his work, and does it quietly," I said to myself; and for the first time I thought of Margery's womanly terrors with something like consideration. Could it be worth Everard Lestrangle's while to set a watch on my actions? Surely not; unless he had some special reason for dreading my presence at Hauteville.

Yet it seemed more likely that the figure hiding behind the elder-hedge, so easily scared away at the sound of my voice, was some hungry wretch bent on knocking over half a dozen rabbits, with which vermin the underwood was overrun.

When I went back to my seat beside the hearth, I told Ja Hawker that I had just given chase to a fellow who looked like a poacher.

"Ay," he said, "there's plenty of 'em about o' dark nights, such as this; I was out and about with my gun for an hour afore supper, and I shall go out again afore I go to bed; but they're cunning rascals, and it ain't easy to catch 'em."

I heard a stealthy kind of knock somewhere in the back premises at this moment, and then my foster-mother's voice speaking to some one, who answered her in so low a key that I could catch nothing that was said, except by Mrs. Hawker. She came in presently.

"'Twas an impudent pedlar fellow," she said, "that wanted me to buy a gown, or a pair of earrings, and then asked if I hadn't a gentleman sleeping here to-night, and how long he was going to stop?"

"A pedlar!" I cried, remembering the man on the coach whose countenance had set my wits to work. "What was he like?"

"I scarce saw his face, Robin, for I wouldn't let him set his root inside the door, and it's dark yonder by the dairy. I could just see that he was short and thick-set and had a long beard, that was all."

"The very man," said I; and then seeing that my foster-mother was alarmed by my eagerness, I went on: "a man who travelled by the coach that brought me from London, mother, that's all. Did you tell him how long I was going to stay?"

"He took me so aback, Robin, that I answered him without thinking. I said you were to sleep here to-night, and I hoped many nights, 'for he's my dear foster-son,' said I, 'and I'm as

proud of him as if he was my very own.' Was there any harm in speaking so free?"

"No harm, mother. The man's face set me thinking, that was all."

Now that we are all calm, sitting round the fire talking comfortably, Jack Hawker drinking somewhat deeply of that small beer, which did not seem to me provocative of thirst, I asked after my old friend Anthony, and told them that I meant to pay him a visit early next morning.

"Alas! Robin," my foster-mother said, compassionately, "thou wouldst see him again alive, thou hast about come in time, for I hear the old man is very near his end. Betty was here two days ago, and told me that the poor soul has grown quite childish and keeps his bed, and that Mrs. Grimshaw thinks to be a widow between this and Christmas. 'Twill be a happy release, they all say; and that's a saying I never like to hear, for it sounds as if a sick man's kinsfolk had grown tired of him, and wanted him out of the world."

Soon after this we separated, and I was ushered into Mrs. Hawker's guest-chamber, a small room with a sloping roof and a casement window—a room which Margery had once occupied, and on the wall whereof her sampler still hung, framed and glazed, as a pendant to a print of the Duke of Marlborough. The little dimity-curtained bed was sweet and pure as a bower of white roses; the patched quilt a marvel of industry, produced by the patient fingers of my foster-mother.

I slept soundly for the first part of the night, worn out by the fatigue of the previous day; but towards daybreak grew restless, and fell a-thinking. Nor were my reflections of an agreeable nature. I was tormented by a feverish eagerness to be astir, although it was not yet light, apprehending that Anthony Grimshaw would die before I could reach Hauteville; and I was now possessed with an unreasonable idea that it was vital for me to see him before he died.

"There is some mystery," I said to myself,—“some secret in which I am concerned. I discovered that in Mrs. Grimshaw's face when I was last at Hauteville. There was something more than simple hatred in her expression. How closely she watched Anthony that day! Did she fear that in some interval of sanity he might tell me the secret of the burglary on the night after Lady Barbara's death?"

My opinion of this business had undergone no modification. I still cherished the conviction that this night attack had been planned by Everard Lestrangle, and that its object had been the destruction of his step-mother's will. She was well known to have kept her private papers in the Japan cabinet, and to search that cabinet had been evidently the chief business of the wretches who broke into her apartments.

I was dressed and below stairs while my foster-mother, who rose at cock-crow, was still busied with her household duties.

"Why, Robin, are these London hours?" she cried, amazed at seeing me descend the narrow stair; "I thought you fine folks never left your beds till noon."

"I am always an early riser, mother, and this morning I was too uneasy to sleep long. After what you told me last night, I am very anxious to see Mr. Grimshaw. First and foremost, because I loved the man, and would not have him leave this world without a parting hand-clasp; and secondly, because I believe he holds a secret that concerns me, and which, would the light of reason but flicker for a moment across his distraught brain, he might reveal."

"Nay, Robin, I fear 'tis hopeless to think he will know thy face," she answered sadly. "He has not called his wife by her right name for the last six months, I hear."

She hastened to prepare my breakfast, and was sorely distressed at finding me unable to eat a hearty meal. It was but seven o'clock when I left the cottage to walk to Hauteville, and the autumnal day had all the freshness of early morning—a perfume and a purity that seemed very sweet to me after my long imprisonment in a sick-room, or such airings as a man may get in the suburbs of a great city. The house was quiet and solemn as of old—long lines of close-shuttered windows—a garden neatly kept, but desolate from very emptiness.

On my way I had meditated the probabilities against my obtaining access to my poor old friend, and I decided that the chance of my admittance was but a slight one. I had got in easily enough upon the last occasion, but then Mrs. Grimshaw had no doubt supposed me safe bestowed in a foreign land—perhaps dead—and had been taken off her guard by my unexpected appearance.

I could hardly hope to surprise her this time. She had in all likelihood given her handmaiden a standing order that I should be refused admittance, let me come when I might.

My forebodings were not realized. Fortune favoured me, or I should say rather, that in a life which had heretofore seemed confused as a tangled skein, the finger of Providence now revealed itself, straightening and unravelling the threads. I began at this time to feel the influence of a stronger Hand than my own leaning and directing me to a pre-ordained end.

I rang the bell at the little side door, in which I had made my entrance and exit so many times in the days of my boyhood—rang it softly, lest I should disturb a scarce awakened household. It was answered quickly, and, to my great satisfaction, by no less a person than that very Mrs. Betty, who had so scrubbed and betwelled my youthful countenance. She started at seeing me.

"Lawks a mercy, if it isn't Master Robert!" she cried.

"Yes, Betty, 'tis I. I have come to take leave of my old friend Mr. Grimshaw, before I go away from England, and I hear from Mrs. Hawker that I have not come too soon. He is very ill, she tells me."

"At death's door, poor soul!" answered Betty, compassionately; "never did a poor weak creature linger as he has lingered. Did my missus write to bid you come?"

"Mrs. Grimshaw? No; I think she is the last person likely to invite me here."

"What! don't you know, then?" said Betty, staring.

"Don't I know what?"

"That the old gentleman has been asking for you, and talking of you in his queer rambling way, off and on, ever since he took to his bed this last time. Sure to goodness she'd write and tell you, if she knew where to write."

"I doubt if she knew my address, Betty, and she might make that an excuse for not writing. Most assuredly she has not written."

"Ah!" cried the woman, sighing significantly, "she was always a hard foe to you, and to your father before you, and I fancy 'twill go hard with her some day, in spite of all her standing up to pray an hour at a stretch at the chapel in Brewer's Yard."

"Is she with her husband this morning?"

"No; she's lying down for a few hours' sleep in the room next his. She's been a good wife to him, there's no denying, and has watched day and night till she's pretty near worn out. But it would be better for the poor old man if she put on a pleasanter face while she's about him. Would you like to go to him at once, Master Robert? She'll scold me, I dare say, for taking you to him without her leave, but I'd risk a scolding to make the poor soul happy. He has so fumed and fretted about you of late."

"Heaven knows that I loved him," I said, "for he was one of the best friends I ever had."

She led me along a dimly-lighted passage, for throughout this vast mansion the daylight was admitted sparingly, up a secondary staircase, to that range of rooms on the second floor which were appropriated to servants, and, on occasion, to visitors of somewhat inferior degree—comfortable chambers enough, but less lofty and spacious than those below, and furnished with decency rather than splendour, except in some instances where the furniture which had once adorned a state apartment was relegated in its decay to these upper regions.

Betty ushered me into a square room with two windows—a room made gloomy by these relics of former splendour—a tall

Elizabethan bedstead of carved walnut-wood, which with age had grown black as ebony—tattered crimson silk hangings—and chairs and tables of the same period; a queer old Flemish commode between two of the windows, provided with innumerable drawers, of all shapes and sizes, elaborately ornamented with carved figures, which might be mythological or angelical, and surmounted by a small square mirror, framed in lacquered metal. There was a dark thick carpet in the centre of the room, a fire burning in the wide grate, and a damask-covered sofa of more modern manufacture than the rest of the furniture, drawn close to the hearth. Beside this sofa I saw a small table with a pile of pamphlets in gray paper, and a large silver watch lying by them. Close to the bed there was another table, crowded with medicine bottles.

The old man was asleep when we entered, but Betty whispered me that he rarely slept more than half an hour at a time. "And 'tis then but dozing," she added; "he is as restless as a teething child." I stood by the bed-side and looked down at him. Wan and wasted as he had been when I had last seen him, he was much changed for the worse. The face was now but a parchment mask, with sharp pinched features—the hand lying on the counterpane was attenuated to transparency.

The sleeper stirred and murmured in his sleep as I watched him, as if dimly conscious of my presence. Seeing this, and fearful of curtailing his brief slumber, I moved away from the bed softly, and seated myself on the sofa by the fire. The windows were close shut, the fire large, and the atmosphere of the room somewhat oppressive. Betty retired and left me alone with the sick man.

I had not long to wait for his waking. He began presently to move uneasily, with a faint, half-stifled groan at every movement, tossed the bed-clothes impatiently from his shoulders, and finally opened his eyes and gazed at me.

"Roderick!" he quavered, with tremulous accents, "Roderick, is it you?"

I went to the bedside, and seated myself close to him.

"Nay, dear sir," I said, bending over him and putting my arm behind his pillow to support the weary head; "'tis not Roderick, but your affectionate pupil, his son. Dear old friend, I am sure thou wilt remember me; and I hear that you have been asking for me of late."

"Robert," he gasped, "Robert! Yes, yes, thy father died. 'Tis thee I have been thinking of. And they told me you were in India. But you have come home—thank God for that!—you have come in time."

His air to-day seemed reason itself, yet he had clearly no memory of my former visit.

"Come home in time," he repeated to himself—"home in time."

But he'll pass away like the rest—shadows, only shadows. Haven't I seen *her* a thousand times? Barbara!"

No language can describe the tenderness with which he spoke that name, and that one utterance gave rise to a conjecture that I fancy was scarce groundless—the suspicion that in the days long gone, this quiet scholar might have felt something more than a mere servitor's fidelity for his master's daughter.

"I have come here to remain with you as long as you please, sir," I said; "I will not quit your bedside."

He looked at me with so intense an eagerness, so keen a scrutiny that I fancied he was on the point of making some momentous communication, but in the next minute he broke into a senile laugh, and began to babble in a rambling way about our old studies—asking me if I remembered a doubtful passage in *Æschylus* which I had once had the temerity to dispute with him.

In this way he went on for upwards of an hour—betimes silent, anon loquacious, but always rambling—and I began to have little hope of ever extorting from him any secret which he might possess concerning my interests, or the mystery of the burglarious attack upon Hauteville.

He was still lying with his head sustained by my arm, in which attitude he seemed to find some comfort, and had sunk into a slumber that was more tranquil than what I had seen of the last, when his wife entered by a door communicating with the next room. She started at sight of me, and her pale face grew a shade paler, but she did not appear to lose her self-possession, and saluted me with her usual repellant air.

"Your servant, Mr. Ainsleigh," she said. "I did not suppose that we should be honoured by another visit from you at Hauteville. I fancied you had returned to the Indies, where I should conceive you would find yourself more in your element among a parcel of lawless marauders, than among decent folks here in England."

"I thank you, madam, for the compliment. The men whom you are pleased to style lawless marauders have obtained for Britain the richest conquest she ever yet achieved; and happy will our country be can she but retain so magnificent a prize."

"And may I inquire, sir, what motive has brought you here to-day?"

"I have come to see my old friend, your husband, who, I hear, has been asking for me."

"Who told you that," she demanded sharply.

"The servant who admitted me."

"She was mighty officious to babble of my affairs to the first comer. As to my husband's mumbling your name sometimes in his ramblings, Mr. Ainsleigh, I do not consider that a matter of any moment. His poor wandering brain has been busy with all the events of his past life, and could hardly miss



the memory of a pupil who, no doubt, gave him plenty of trouble in his time."

"By my dulness I may possibly have done so, madam, but by no undutiful act, as you know."

"Oh, sir, I think you are aware that you were never any especial favourite of mine. I detest a paragon."

"Ay, madam, your fancies lean rather the other way—to the prodigal son. My father was a favourite of yours until he offended you."

Martha Grimshaw's face flamed scarlet in a moment, and then grew almost livid with stifled fury.

"Your father was a villain, sir! and I doubt not you are as like him in mind as you are in person. And now, sir, since you have gratified your affection, or your curiosity, by the contemplation of this poor object, my sick husband, you will, I hope, favour me by taking your leave."

"I have no intention of departing just yet, Mrs. Grimshaw." I answered coolly. "Your husband seems pleased with my presence, and it would need even more discouragement than you can offer to drive me from him."

"My husband!" she cried scornfully, "do you suppose he knows one person from another?"

"He has recognized me, Mrs. Grimshaw, and has talked for some time of the days of my tutelage."

She stared at me with an angry yet baffled look, and for some moments seemed at a loss.

"I wonder, Mr. Ainsleigh," she said at last, "you can be so mean-spirited as to remain in a house where you know you are not welcome. Do you think Sir Everard Lestrangle would permit you to cross his threshold were he at hand to prevent it?"

"I much doubt his power to hinder me, madam, were he here to make the attempt. And his ownership of this house is a fact of which I am also doubtful."

She looked at me this time with a gaze more malignant than any she had yet cast upon me, but fear was mingled with that malignity, and I felt more than ever assured that she had some reason for dreading my presence in this place, and more than ever resolved to remain.

Unfriendly as our colloquy had been, we had spoken in tones so measured that the sleeper had not been disturbed by our voices. He slumbered on heavily, and with laboured breathing, still resting on my arm. Mrs. Grimshaw contemplated us both for some moments in silence, and then withdrew to her sofa, where she soon appeared to become absorbed in the perusal of one of those gray-paper covered pamphlets which, I doubted not, contained the pious lucubrations of some favourite teacher.

From this time her manner to me underwent a complete

change. She now became ceremoniously polite, offered me refreshment, and begged me to remain as long as I was inclined.

"I hope I have profited better by the monitions of my minister than to cherish animosity," she began, looking up from her book by-and-by, when her husband had been awake some time, and rambling on childishly, with his hand in mine, "even against one who has ever treated me with contumely. I was angry with my servant for admitting you to this room, because I do not like that sad spectacle of human weakness to be exhibited to any eyes but my own and the doctor's. Yet, since you are here in spite of me, Mr. Ainsleigh, I have no desire to be otherwise than civil."

"Your civility comes rather late, madam," said I, "but it is not the less welcome on that account."

The doctor came in presently—a mere village practitioner, who had attended me years ago in childish fevers and surfeits. He did not recognize me at once, but went straight to his patient, and began the usual formula. He made minute inquiries as to the due administration of various draughts, boluses, blisters, and other medicaments which he had supplied, and which seemed so numerous that I could but wonder the victim had survived the torments of such a system.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Grimshaw," he exclaimed at last, "I think our patient has rallied a little; the eye is a trifle brighter—the pulse a thought stronger. Not that I would hold out any hope of permanent improvement. No, madam, at your husband's age, and with his infirmities, to speak of hope would be but to delude."

"He has a hope superior to any that you can give him, I trust, Mr. Hender," Mrs. Grimshaw answered severely,—“the hope that his sins, which are as scarlet——”

"Undoubtedly, my dear madam," exclaimed Mr. Hender, cutting short any intended disquisition by the readiness of his acquiescence—"unquestionably, madam; but as I remarked before, our patient is somewhat brighter this morning. That decoction of camomile with conserve of roses had no doubt a soothing and invigorating effect; and the electuary I think has been beneficial."

The doctor lingered a little, glancing at me suspiciously.

"And—ahem—is this gentleman a member of our learned profession, madam?" he inquired.

"No, Mr. Hender, I have not that honour—but I have had the gratification of being your patient; and I think I can recall the very flavour of that camomile and conserve of roses you speak of."

"What! sir, have I ever prescribed for you?"

"More than once, sir. You steered me safely through the dangers of a scarlet fever, about fifteen years ago. My name is Ainsleigh."

"What! Master Robert—the little lad that noble creature Lady Barbara Lestrangle adopted? You astound me. Why, then, I doubt not 'tis your coming has revived our old friend—for he has done nothing but rave about you."

Mrs. Grimshaw bit her lip impatiently, but was silent. I followed the doctor into the corridor, and asked him to tell me frankly whether his patient was likely to last much longer, and whether any relief or comfort could be afforded him by the advice of a London physician.

"I do not for an instant question your ability, Mr. Hender," I said; "and I know that you have had ample experience among your rustic patients. But there is sometimes a kind of satisfaction in having recourse to the highest advice."

Mr. Hender shrugged his shoulder.

"Assemble the whole College of Physicians, my dear sir, and they can do no more for this poor old ruin than I have done. He received his death-blow from the ruffians who broke into this house years ago. He has lingered years instead of months, and it is to my mind a miracle that he has lasted so long. As to the end, sir, I cannot tell you to an hour when that may be, but the thread of life is worn very thin. It must speedily snap."

I thanked him for his candour, and went back to the bedside, determined to stop till the end, let it come when it might.

Throughout the dull autumn day Mrs. Grimshaw and I kept watch in the sick-chamber—she on her sofa by the fire, sitting bolt upright, sometimes reading, sometimes working, with a needle that moved with a monotonous click, and kept as good time as the ticking of the eight-day clock in the corridor outside. So idle were my thoughts sometimes during the slow silent hours, that I must needs take notice of the fact that Mrs. Grimshaw's thread never by any chance became entangled, but moved with the smoothness and precision of clockwork. How different a picture was this stern automatonical figure from Margery at work, as I had often seen her of late, the bright face bent over the embroidery frame, a heap of rainbow-hued silks scattered about, and the colour she wanted always missing; and then what pretty impatience and fuming and exclaiming, and what impossible knots to be disentangled with my aid! And from this agreeable vision my vagabond fancy flew to another—on which, alas! it dwelt much longer—the fair pale face of Dorothea Hemsley, as I had seen it so often in that house, looking up at me ever and anon as I read aloud to the two ladies in my benefactress's morning room. Ah! sweet face, should I ever see thee again? Had I not not forfeited even the right to remember, as well as the right to hope?

The old man was very quiet, talked rarely, and took his medicines and nourishment with a mechanical patience that seemed the result of long habit. He gave a weary sigh now and then

as of one who wondered why he must be troubled so often, to so little purpose, but submitted always. That my presence was agreeable, and in some manner comforting to him, I had ample evidence. After every brief slumber—and he spent the whole day in alternate snatches of waking and sleeping—he appeared to have forgotten the fact of my presence, and recognized me always with the same expression of pleased surprise.

"Robert Ainsleigh," he would say, smiling at me—"my pupil Robert! They told me he was dead—nay, that was Roderick—'twas Roderick that died! Robert, my old pupil!"

Then, after a long pause, and a little unintelligible murmuring, he would fancy we were at our studies, and exclaim,—

"Come, let us begin, Robert; open your Virgil, boy. The second book," and would anon proceed to quote the *Æneid*, in his poor feeble tones, but with infinite gusto.

At another time he would begin the conjugation of a Greek or Latin verb, and wander for half an hour at a stretch in a maze of tenses.

"That I should live to forget the pluperfect of," he would exclaim, hopelessly.

So the day crept on, and waned, without his having been visited by one glimmer of reason, save that which had inspired me with hope at my first coming. He lay with his hand in mine, and smiled at me affectionately, but all his talk was in shreds and patches, and of the daily studies of my boyhood. He never referred to my departure from Hauteville, or to any event that had happened since I left. Every time that he awoke and recognized me, he urged me to remain with him, in a piteous manner, that went to my heart.

"You'll not melt away as all the rest do," he cried. "I've seen all that I love best in this room; but when I speak to them they vanish, and leave me alone with her."

He pointed at his wife as he spoke, and then bringing his face nearer mine, whispered,—

"Who is she? I don't know her. Why does she sit there always, stitching my shroud? It's nearly finished, isn't it? Heaven knows, I'm ready for it, Robert."

In spite of his rambling talk, there was at times such a reasonable air about him, that I felt much inclined to test him by direct interrogation upon the subject of the burglary. I could not attempt this, however, while Mrs. Grimshaw remained in the room, and I cherished the hope that she would, sooner or later, be compelled to leave us together.

This devoutly-wished consummation did not occur. The lady held her ground with a calm persistency which showed me she had no intention to give me the opportunity I desired. She was monstrously civil, ordered a dinner to be served for me in her sitting-room on the ground-floor, whither I was conducted

by Mrs. Betty, who waited upon me during the meal, and was infinitely loquacious, but had evidently nothing of importance to communicate. Had she been acquainted with any of the secrets of that house, her mistress would doubtless have been too wise to trust us together.

"You will return to your friends the Hawkers at nightfall. I suppose, sir?" Mrs. Grimshaw said to me when it was growing dusk.

"Nay, madam," I replied, "if you have no objection, I should much prefer to remain here all night, and share your watch; or, if you please, relieve you from the necessity of watching. From what Mr. Hender has said, I can but infer that your poor husband is very near his end, and, if possible, I would be with him at the last."

"You are vastly affectionate, sir," she exclaimed, controlling her temper with an evident effort, "and since you came uninvited, I suppose you must stay uninvited. Sure 'tis all of a piece."

After this speech she remained for some time absorbed in thought, and then became even more civil than she had been before, inviting me to take a dish of tea with her.

I watched all that night, and Martha Grimshaw with me. In those long dead hours of the night the patient slept much less than in the day, and was infinitely more restless. It was weary work to nurse and soothe him—weariness to see his weariness; but for me it was a labour of love, and so that night passed, and another gray autumnal morning glimmered with a chilly light between the drawn curtains of the sick-chamber. I had some idea of going back to Jack Hawker's cottage for a few hours in the course of the day, but, on reflection, resolved to hold my ground where I was. How could I be sure of readmittance should I be so imprudent as to trust myself outside the doors of Hauteville? I wrote to Margery, therefore, telling her that my return was uncertain, and explaining the cause of my detention, and entrusted my letter to Mrs. Betty for conveyance to the Warborough post-office. Mr. Hender came at noon, and pronounced his patient considerably enfeebled by a restless night.

"The poor soul cannot last much longer, Mrs. Grimshaw," he said; "and I am sure, madam, as the end approaches, you must derive a profound satisfaction from the consciousness that you have performed your duty in so admirable a manner."

Mrs. Grimshaw bowed, and acknowledged the doctor's compliment with a frosty smile.

"You are very good to say as much, sir; I have endeavoured to fulfil my obligations in a Christian spirit."

"And have succeeded, madam—have succeeded to a degree that sheds lustre upon your sex."

For three days and three nights we watched, and in all that

time Mrs. Grimshaw never left me alone with her patient; for when she did retire to snatch an hour's rest, which was a rare occurrence, she left a strange maid-servant on guard with me, and I had thus no opportunity of attempting to elicit some ray of memory from the sick man's mind.

For three days and three nights I sat beside my old friend's bed, and smoothed his pillow, and helped to administer his medicines; and still there was no change, or a change so subtle that I could not trace its progress. The hours were very long in the monotonous silence of that gloomy chamber, and it was only with difficulty that I could realize the fact that I had spent the smaller half of a week only at Hauteville. I began to think that the period of my watch might stretch out indefinitely, and that it might be months before I should be free to quit that strange seclusion. To my surprise, Mrs. Grimshaw became hourly more civil. She was even so far mollified as to converse with me over our dish of tea; and was good enough to inform me that her husband had made his will a year before the burglary, and bequeathed to her the entire sum of his accumulations.

"He has been a miser all his life," she said. "He has received good wages and spent nothing. His wages ceased, of course, after the burglary, from which time he has been only a pensioner on Sir Everard's bounty. But that worthy gentleman has been so good as to allow him a pension of fifty pounds a year, besides the privilege of a comfortable home in this place."

"I should hardly have given Sir Everard Lestrange credit for so much generosity," I remarked.

"Nay, sir, we know that you were never a lover of the gentleman."

"Has the estate been without a steward since your poor husband's affliction?" I inquired.

"There has been no house steward, but accounts are paid and rents collected by Mr. Nixon, the lawyer, of Warborough."

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## CHAPTER XLII

### AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

It was on the fourth evening of my residence at Hauteville, and I sat musing before the fire, gazing into the cavernous depths of burning coal as if I would fain have read my destiny there. 'Twas nightfall, and the rooks, whose harsh voices I knew so well in my boyhood, were clamouring hoarsely as they flew home to their ragged nests in the tall elms across the ha-ha. Mrs. Grimshaw had gone to lie down for an hour in the adjoining chamber, leaving the door between the two rooms ajar, so that I knew not whether she might be sleeping, or lying awake to listen to anything that might be said or done in the sick-room. The day had been dull, but the sun had set redly, and a

blood-red streak lingered on the horizon when I last looked wistfully out at the evening sky. The windows had blackened since then with the deepening night, and there was now no light in the room but the red glow of the fire. The tall bedstead, with its wine-dark hangings, the quaintly carved commode between the windows, and all the ponderous antique furniture of the room had a somewhat weird look in this light, and I could but think of those German legends I had read of a penniless wanderer who, for hope of reward, volunteers to pass the night in the chief bed-chamber of a haunted castle. Here, alas! there was something more real than ghost or goblin—there was the swift approaching shadow of death.

I was not alone with the sick man. Hester Grubb, the maid-servant was seated at a respectful distance, with her arms folded primly, and her gooseberry-coloured eyes fixed upon me. She was a damsel of the sanctimonious school, a devout disciple of the saint in Brewer's Yard, and seemed to be more favoured by her mistress than my old acquaintance Mrs. Betty. I had not the slightest doubt she was set as a watch over me; and this extreme carefulness on the part of Mrs. Grimshaw went far to confirm me in the conviction that the dying man was the repository of some secret which it behoved me to discover.

"Alas! how speedily will those lips be sealed," I thought, as I glanced towards the wan face lying on the pillow, with closed eyelids; "how soon will that feeble voice be dumb, and then whatever wrong he might help to set right will remain immutable."

I was sorely tired this evening, as I sat gazing into the fire. My protracted watch had well-nigh worn out spirit and body together. The hope which, as well as my affection for this poor old man, had brought me to Hauteville was fast expiring. Even my own future, which had seemed fair enough to me in London by the light of Margery's smile, wore now a dark and doubtful aspect; nor did I struggle against the despondent fit that oppressed me. On the contrary, I abandoned myself to these gloomy fancies, and sat brooding upon my perplexities until sleep came to my relief. My eyes closed in despite of my endeavours to keep them open, and I passed at once into that mystic world which we enter so swiftly, and which is yet so remote from the scene of our waking life. How or why I should have dreamt as I did dream that evening I know not—whether by some occult magnetic influence, which only the student or the dark science believes in, or by the mere accident of a dreamer's fancy. I have tried often to explain this thing to myself, but have failed entirely, and can only place the fact on record as a curious episode in my life. I only know that, although all my thoughts were concentrated upon Hauteville and its inmates, I had no sooner closed my eyes than I was in

India, at Plassey, fighting over again that skirmish with the Frenchmen guarding the tank. The vision was singularly vivid. I felt the burning sun beating down upon my uncovered head—heard the clash and clamour of war—saw the intense blue sky, the flashing river, the pomp and splendour of the Moorish host, and, above all, a face glaring down upon me that was like my own—the face of the man with whom I was grappling, hand to hand, on the steep slippery bank.

We had closed in what seemed a death-struggle, and I had my sword at his breast, when an awful voice, issuing from I know not whence, cried out, "Stay, wretch! would you murder your father?"

I woke with a start at that terrible address; or, it may be, awakened by the sound of a knocking at the door of the sick-chamber. I started to my feet, full of a strange fear, went hurriedly to the door, opened it and found myself face to face with my father.

It was the very countenance I had seen in my dream, but not as in that vision, convulsed with anger. It looked at me with a grave and quiet smile.

"Why, Robert, you gaze as if at sight of a ghost. Is it so strange a thing for adventurers who met yesterday in Hindostan to meet to-day in England? I told you when we parted, that the wind which tosses such a waif as I hither and thither, just as it scatters the leaves of the forest, might blow me your way sooner or later. Come, child, are you going to swoon, that you turn so white?"

"Nay, sir, 'twere a womanish thing to swoon, but the surprise—the pleasure——!"

"Is it verily a pleasure, Robert, to see thine outcast father?"

"Indeed, sir, I can imagine few higher pleasures."

We were standing in the corridor outside Mr. Grimshaw's bedchamber, honest Betty a few paces off, candle in hand, staring at us.

"Lord knows what my mistress will do to me for letting the gentleman in," she ejaculated, "but he said he wanted to see you, Master Robert, and that he must speak to Mr. Grimshaw before he died, and was so pressing that I could not say him nay. And if my mistress should be furious—as it's likely she will be when she finds a stranger here—you'll please tell her, Master Robert, 'twas no fault of mine."

With which speech Mrs. Betty washed her hands of the business and retired, leaving us in the dark.

"What brought you to England, sir?" I asked, as I clasped my father's hands in both of mine, "and to this house?"

"I can best answer, like the fellow in the play," he replied, in that agreeably careless manner which I remembered so well—the manner of one who has indeed been like a leaf tossed about



by every wind that blows. " 'A truant dispositioon, good, my lord.' I was sick of a fever after we parted company at Muxadavad, and being incapacitated for war, was sent back to France with a party of wretches as decrepit as myself. On my recovery, they transferred me to a regiment serving at home, and I was quartered at Havre, where I have dawdled away half a year or so pleasantly enough in garrison. Many and many a time have I thought of thee, Bob—thou wouldst scarce believe with what tenderness and longing—until at last the yearning of my foolish heart for thee grew so strong, that I, who have rarely asked a favour from my superiors, must needs turn beggar, and supplicate for a month's leave of absence. I came to London, after being sorely beaten about between Havre and Southampton, went straight to Mr. Swinfen, whose clerk gave me your address in the Temple. At your chambers I could discover nothing, but that a lady lodging in Surry Street would be best able to give me information of your movements. I went thereupon to the lady in Surry Street—a most gracious and lovely creature—who told me where to find you, and by every glance and tone unconsciously revealed that you are the object of her supreme tenderness."

"That lady is to be my wife, sir," I said gravely.

"Indeed! that hardly jumps with the story you told me when we were together at Muxadavad."

I felt the hot blood in my cheeks at this home-thrust. I had, indeed, hinted at my passion for Dora in my confidences to my father.

"Nay, sir," I faltered, "there are events which turn the whole current of a man's life. I owe so vast a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Hunter, that the devotion of all my future years will but poorly balance it."

"Say thou art inconstant, Bob, and I am content," exclaimed my father, hastily. "Mrs. Hunter is a fair excuse for a man to change his mind, especially when his first fancy is cut short by the *cul de sac* of matrimony; but, for God's sake, talk not of gratitude. I would not have thee marry like thy father. Yet think not I would malign the dead. Thy mother was the fondest and truest of women, and might have made a better man happy, but there were hours in which I almost hated her, because she was not that other one."

We were still standing in the embrasure of the door, talking in an undertone. I was glad to cut the conversation short at this stage, for it had grown more painful than I can express. Instead, therefore, of replying to this last speech of my father's, I opened the door softly, and peeped into the sick-room.

The old man was still asleep; the servant had lighted a candle, and was seated by it, reading a pious book, after the exact image of her mistress.

"Would you like to see him?" I asked my father in a whisper.

"Poor old Tony? Ay, Bob, 'twas that desire which in part brought me here, since I could have waited easily for your return to London—that, and a vague foolish wish to look upon the scene of my youth with these world-weary eyes. Is he so very ill?"

"He lives—that is as much as any one can say."

"Poor soul! I think I had influence over him once. I know that he loved me, and bore with my wayward humours with a sublime patience. If such a man as I could go to heaven, Bob, what a long score he would have to settle with old friends when he got there. We are sorry for our misdeeds when those we sinned against are passed beyond the sight of our penitence. God grant us a day of reckoning in a better world, and that we may be forgiven!"

We went softly into the room—the maid dropped her book, and stared at my companion with open mouth. I believe she took him for a strange doctor. She slipped out of the room as soon as she recovered her senses, doubtless to acquaint her mistress with what was taking place. I laid my hand upon my father's arm as he was going towards the bed.

"Remember, sir," I whispered, "this poor soul believes you dead. May not your sudden appearance prove a fatal shock to one in his weak state?"

"Nay, child, from what the woman said who admitted me, I supposed him past all capability of recognition, and that one face was the same to him as another."

"You are wrong, sir. He knew my face—mistaking it at first for yours, I admit, but speedily perceiving who I was."

"He took you for me, and the shock was not fatal, you see," said my father. "He has therefore, doubtless forgotten the fact of my supposed death."

"I scarce know how much he forgets or remembers," I replied; "his brain is in a strange confusion. Yet there are gleams of light, and I have been waiting in the hope that before the end his mind would clear, and I should discover——"

"What?"

"The fate of Lady Barbara's will."

The old man opened his eyes as I spoke those words.

"Yes," he cried, with a shrill voice which was louder than I had heard from him yet, "Lady Barbara's will—that was the name of the paper."

My father took the candle from the table, and stood with the light shining full upon his face.

"Tony," he said, with an expression that was at once grave and tender, "do you remember me?"

"Remember thee?" exclaimed the old man, with a little hysterical laugh. "The lad I taught thirty years ago! My

wilful, foolish, brilliant boy, Roderick! Remember thee? When I lie dumb in my grave I shall still remember thee—or death is something worse than I take it to be. They said thou wert dead years ago—but I knew better. The old man knew better than those Job's comforters. Oh, Roderick! Roderick! why didst thou stop away so long? Villainous things have been done behind thy back."

His manner was singularly rational—every word clearly spoken—though in a voice that was very feeble. It seemed to me that the moment for which I had prayed and waited had now arrived, and that the light of reason was rekindled in this clouded brain.

My father seated himself as I had done, by the bedside, and took the old man's wasted hand in his.

"Dear old Tony," he said softly, "be calm, I beseech thee. 'Tis sweet to be welcomed so lovingly; and Heaven knows I but ill deserved thine affection."

"Nay, child, thou wert the pride of my heart. Sure thou hadst a natural genius for the exact sciences—and wert a very pretty hand at the classics. Hast thou forgotten all I taught thee by this time?"

"Upon my soul, Tony, I believe I have achieved wonders in the way of forgetfulness. But I found my knowledge of mathematics uncommonly useful now and then in solving an engineering difficulty—as some of the gentlemen I have lived amongst could tell you, were they at hand to speak for me."

"A natural genius!" the old man repeated, suddenly relapsing into his accustomed semi-childish manner. "The mathematician is born, not made—a natural genius!" and then, after a pause, he continued in the same dreaming tone, "Lady Barbara's will—Lady Barbara's will—ay, that was the paper—who says Tony was unfaithful? Let them strike! I'm only an old man. They shall never know. Tony Grimshaw will die sooner than let them know."

I looked at my father, and he at me significantly. We seemed on the threshold of a revelation, and yet might be as far away from it as ever. 'Twas vain to dream of forcing the old man's memory by interrogation. The expiring mind was like a marsh fire, now flashing bright, now vanishing in darkness. We could but watch, and be patient.

While the old man lay muttering, the door between the two rooms was flung suddenly open, and Mrs. Grimshaw flounced in upon us in a tantrum. Now, I had been so engrossed by the consideration of what effect my father's appearance might have upon poor old Anthony, that I had not for a moment foreseen the shock which this resurrection from the grave might inflict upon Anthony's wife.

She came forward to me with anger in every lineament.

"I am astounded, sir!" she exclaimed, "that you should have the impertinence to summon a strange doctor without even paying me the compliment to ask my leave. But it matches with your general conduct, and I ought hardly to be surprised."

"This gentleman is no doctor, madam," I replied; "but an old acquaintance of yours."

She had until this moment looked only at me. She now glanced towards my father, at once recognized him, and with a scream that rang through the chamber, sank swooning into a chair.

I called her maid, who performed the usual offices, and speedily brought the lady to her senses. She opened her eyes, and after gazing round about her for some moments in a half-bewildered way, she appeared to recover her recollection.

"You do well, sir," she said, looking at my father with a suppressed fire of hate and vengeance in her eyes,—*"you do well to rise from the dead in order to scare an honest woman, whose greatest happiness was to have forgotten you."*

"Madam," replied my father, calmly, "I doubt not that your guilty conscience, which must needs have accused you of the numerous injuries you did me, when you had the ear of your mistress, was best comforted by forgetfulness. You perceive, however, that some ghosts are not easily laid."

The panic-stricken wretch tried to falter an insolent answer, but could say nothing. Her lips trembled mutely; she looked at my father for some moments with a strange expression, and then burst into a flood of tears. They were the first I had ever seen her shed, nor could I have believed her stern nature capable of such profound emotion as that which now convulsed her frame.

For some minutes she abandoned herself to that passion of weeping, then rose and rushed from the room, exclaiming in half-stifled accents,—

"I loved you, Roderick—I loved you!"

My father shrugged his shoulders, with a little bitter laugh.

"A pretty confession, truly!" he exclaimed. "Do you know, Bob, I believe that woman to have been the bane of my life? She was insidious as Satan himself, and was always at my mistress's elbow, ready to whisper away my credit. But for her we should never have quarrelled; but for her we should never have parted. And now that my life is broken, and Barbara is in her grave, she pleads her passion for me as an excuse for having compassed my destruction. And as I am a gentleman, Robert, I never said her a word but in the merest every-day civility, though I have bribed her with many a guinea. Why, she was the plainest woman in Berkshire, and had about as much figure as the village maypole!"

I could but marvel at that habitual carelessness of my father's

disposition, which made him speak lightly even of this business which had involved such serious issues.

The old man had been awake during this scene, and had gazed upon his wife's emotion with a countenance full of wonder and alarm. When she had vanished, slamming the door behind her he exclaimed, in a senile tone,—

"A clever woman—a very remarkable woman—but she has ner temper!"

He repeated this sentence several times, and at last dropped off to sleep in the act of mumbling it.

My father and I were now, to all intents and purposes, alone. The maid had followed her mistress, nor did either return during the rest of that evening. It seemed that, upon my father's appearance, all discipline was abandoned. Mrs. Betty, who brought us our tea, informed me that Mrs. Grimshaw was in strong hysterics, and that Hester Grubb was drenching her with brandy and salt—at this time a popular remedy for almost all the ills which flesh is heir to.

Being thus left in complete possession of the sick-chamber, I took upon myself the duties of nurse, with some slight assistance from Mrs. Betty, who brought me the broths and messes which the invalid took at stated intervals. He slept considerably this evening, and seemed to rest more quietly than before my father's coming. It might have been that the agitation attendant on such a recognition had exhausted his weak spirits; or it might have been that he had a vague satisfaction and comfort in the presence of his first and favourite pupil.

My father and I talked long. I had much to tell him of my adventures since we parted company in India, and I told him everything with perfect unreserve—except, indeed, when I came to the story of my offer to Margery, of which I gave him but a sketch.

He was warmly interested in my affairs, and much struck by my relation of my interview with Mrs. Winbolt, the milliner in Long Acre.

"Why, then, Barbara did verily make a will!" he exclaimed; "and, by her manner of making it, we may fairly surmise it was in your favour, but was doubtless destroyed by those who found it after her death."

"Yes, sir; and be sure it was for that purpose this house was broken into the night after she died, and before the seals could be attached to her effects. That very cabinet which the intruders destroyed was the receptacle in which she kept her private papers. You will remember that, as I have just informed you, she was down here for a week before her death. Who can doubt that, in that time, she put away her will, and that 'twas known or suspected she had done so? Rely upon it, there were spies in her husband's household to acquaint him with her smallest movements."

"Do you imagine Sir Marcus Lestrange capable of so great a villainy?"

"I know very little of Sir Marcus, save that he turned me out of doors on the strength of a groundless accusation; but I know Everard Lestrange to be apt at iniquity, and I have, from the very outset—even before I had heard Mrs. Winbolt's story—given him credit for being the author of the attack on yonder poor old man, either in his own person or by the hands of his agents."

"Hardly in his own person, I should think," said my father, musing; "that would have been too hazardous. But it certainly seems scarcely reasonable that Barbara should have made a will, and died intestate three weeks after making it. She was not the woman to be fickle or frivolous."

"Indeed, no, sir; and I can hardly conceive that, after the warm interest she had ever evinced in my welfare, and with her knowledge of the wrong that had been done me, she would leave me no pittance out of her wealth. I care but little for the loss of fortune; my future life is to be that of a soldier—without thought of the morrow; but it goes against me that a villain should continue to prosper."

My father shrugged his shoulders, after his foreign fashion.

"'Tis a world in which villainy is apt to be prosperous," he said.

The night grew late; and, at last, even in my father's agreeable company, I began to feel that sense of weariness, against which I had struggled so long, creeping over me. I stifled several yawns, dropped asleep more than once in the midst of a sentence, and by various other signs, betrayed my condition.

"How long have you been watching, Bob?" my father asked, by-and-by.

"This is the fifth night."

"Then why, in Heaven's name, didst thou not tell me so at first, thou victim of friendship? Lie down on that sofa, and take a good night's rest, while I perform your duties by the sick-bed. I slept soundly last night, and dozed away half the day in the stage-coach that brought me to Warborough."

I consented somewhat reluctantly, after giving my companion careful instructions about the medicines and broths to be administered during the rest of the night.

"You'll awaken me, if he should grow worse?" I said.

"Ay, Bob; but I know the signs of approaching death well enough to be sure that the end is not so near as you fancy. You may take a night's rest without fear. Poor old Tony's pulse is stronger than when I first touched his wrist."

He was standing by the bed, looking down at the old man who was sleeping more peacefully than I had seen him sleep since my coming.

"One would suppose he was renovated by your presence," I said.

"Who can tell what he feels? I told you I always had

influence over him—could lead him by the nose, my uncle said. My uncle”—he repeated in an altered voice—“how strange that name seems! It wounded me like the thrust of a dagger just now when I spoke it carelessly, unawares. ’Twas in this house we parted with bitterness and anger. And I was never to see his face again! O God, how careless youth is! I thought of nothing but my own wrongs—not of his pain—although he had been a second father to me. Do you not wonder how I have endured life, Robert, with so many sins upon my head? But I have lived on, you see, and carried my burden. Is there such an exquisite pleasure in eating, drinking, and sleeping, that a man should live for those when all else has been taken from him?”

“Nay, sir,” I said, “I venture to think that Providence has meant kindly to us both in bringing us together after so many years of severance, and that in the affection of your only son you may perchance find some recompense for the loss of those you loved in the past.”

“In the past—in the present—in the future, Robert,” he cried in his wild manner. “I shall adore my cousin Barbara till I am clay. And then turning to me, with a graver aspect, he asked,—

“And dost thou verily love me, Bob—the father to whom thou dost not owe one single benefit?”

“Fate willed it so, sir, but I love you with all my heart.”

After this I lay down upon Mrs. Grimshaw’s sofa, and suffered my father to cover me with his riding-coat. I lay for some minutes gazing upon him dreamily as he sat in a capacious arm-chair by the bed, and then sleep stole upon my wearied brain—oh! so sweetly.

This time my dreams were of the vaguest—dreams which I have never been able to recall, but I know that the living and the dead were with me—now lady Barbara, now Dora, and Margery, and that many shifting scenes passed before me. After these confused visions there followed, I think, a slumber that was dreamless, for, on awakening suddenly at some slight sound in the room, I seemed to emerge from a world of empty darkness. The fire had burnt low, a glimmer of the cold daylight was creeping in through the aperture left by an ill-closed curtain, one of the candles had gone out, and the other shed a sickly uncertain light by which I could at first scarce distinguish objects in the chamber. I looked across to the bed,—my father was still seated at his post, but was sleeping soundly. The bed was empty. I started to my feet with a faint cry of alarm, and, turning round, beheld Anthony Grimshaw on his knees before the old Flemish commode, which I have described in these pages—a weird shrunken figure, with naked legs and feet—a figure which Mr. Hogarth might have painted.

The lighted candle stood on the top of the commode, and the old man was busily groping among the numerous small drawers

and cupboards and curious hiding-places with which this ancient piece of cabinet-work was superabundantly supplied.

My first impulse was to carry him back to bed, but presently wonder and curiosity transfixed me, and I stood motionless watching him and listening to him.

He was muttering to himself as he groped and fumbled, "Lady Barbara's will—yes, yes—that was the document. 'Into your hands, my faithful Anthony—into your hands. I would rather trust you than those around me. I commit this paper into your hands, and when the time comes you will produce it.' But the time is not come. She is not dead yet—no, no, thank God—she is not dead!"

These sentences he mumbled in snatches, opening and shutting the loose old drawers and cupboards with feeble tremulous hands while he talked.

But presently his manner changed. He gave a little shrill cry and exclaimed, with clasped hands,—

"I would sooner sell you my life, gentlemen, than that paper!"

Then came a senile laugh—

"And at the last I cheated them!"

His head was now pushed into the centre cupboard, which was larger than the rest. I heard him pull out an inner drawer, which flew back a moment afterwards with a clicking sound, and he emerged with a folded paper packet in his hand. It was a packet secured by three large seals.

He crept back to his bed on all-fours, with the packet held between his teeth. I saw that he was unconscious of my presence, and feared to startle him by any offer of assistance. He gave a feeble groan when he got into bed, but seemed altogether stronger than I could have supposed possible, after so long a confinement. The packet he disposed of under his pillow, and in a few minutes had sunk into a quiet slumber, exhausted no doubt by this supreme effort.

My heart beat fast and furiously. Could that packet indeed contain the missing will? The old man's words implied as much. And yet how should his disordered brain distinguish one document from another? That which he had been groping for might be the will, but the paper he had found might be any unimportant parcel, laid aside and forgotten. Was it likely that the real thing could have lain hidden in that Flemish commode all this time, undiscovered by the lynx eyes of Mrs. Grimshaw?

Yet how complete a story had been told, to my mind, by those incoherent sentences. A trust conveyed, and accepted. An attack upon an old servant's fidelity. Resistance to the very leath: and the villains, baffled at last by that dogged honesty, departing with their errand unfulfilled.

These thoughts flashed through my mind with lightning swiftness.



I did not stand upon punctilio as to the manner of satisfying my doubts, but knelt down by the bed, and softly drew away the packet from beneath the sleeper's pillow. With a trembling hand I tore open the seals, but I swear that it was a just revenge, and not avarice, that made me so eager.

"To my dear first cousin, once removed, Robert Ainsleigh, only son of my cousin Roderick Ainsleigh, who died at Soho, in the year 1731, I bequeath the whole of my real estate, including Hauteville House and Park, and all lands, tenements, and hereditaments appertaining thereto, subject only to the conditions of my marriage settlement, which gives a life interest in the same to my husband, Sir Marcus Lestrangle," and so on, and so on, through all the customary legal jargon went the will which made me master of Hauteville.

My father awoke while I was still poring over this paper. I handed it to him without a word. He read it slowly through, from the first line to the last.

"Thou wert right, Robert, in thy surmises," he exclaimed, when he had finished his careful perusal, "and Everard Lestrangle has been squandering your wealth, and lording it as master of your manor ever since his father's death. Poor old Tony must have hidden the will, intending to produce it at the proper moment; and those scoundrels who, no doubt, made their attack before the faithful creature had received tidings of his mistress's death, failed in their mission. 'Twas most likely their fury at being baffled that made them use him so ill. Well, Bob, the will is a good will, I take it, late as it comes to hand, and thou art master of Hauteville."

'Twere idle to say that I did not feel a certain pride and rapture in the idea thus presented to my mind. I had affirmed no more than the truth when I said that I cared little for fortune; but I did care for Hauteville, and I did languish for revenge upon the wretch whose malice had blighted my life.

And yet how could I touch Everard Lestrangle without injury to Everard Lestrangle's wife? In thought and feeling, in all that makes marriage sweet and sacred, those two might be as far apart as Jura and the Himalayas; but in fortune, reputation, and in the sight of the world, they were united. To brand him as a scoundrel, would be to bring disgrace upon her.

A few minutes' thought showed me that this was avoidable. I had only to produce Lady Barbara's will, discovered by accident, and to prove it a genuine document. With what difficulties this might be surrounded I knew not, since Anthony Grimshaw's hopeless condition deprived me of my most important witness. There was, however, the evidence of Mrs. Winbolt to prove that a will had been executed, and within three weeks of Lady Barbara's death. No doubt Sir Everard Lestrangle would contest the matter to its furthest limits. For that I was fully prepared

I put the will in my pocket, and slipped a tilded tract, from the collection of that species of literature on Mrs. Grimshaw's table, into the wrapper, which I resealed, and then placed it beneath the old man's pillow. He might awake at any moment and hunt for the packet, but was scarcely likely to detect this innocent imposture.

'Twas now broad daylight. I drew back the curtains and extinguished the candle, which had burned to the socket. The old man awoke presently, and I gave him his breakfast, but he made no effort to find the packet under his pillow, nor did he make the faintest allusion to his searches in the Flemish commode. I fancied that the whole business had faded from the dim tablets of his memory.

I expected Mrs. Grimshaw's reappearance every minute, but the morning advanced and she did not show herself. Mrs. Hester, however, returned to her post in the sick-chamber, and watched us closely. Before this attentive damsel we took the liberty to converse in the French language.

"This is too important a matter to be treated lightly, Bob," said my father, "and I cannot rest till you have put it in the right hands. There is poor old Tony yonder, who I fear cannot last much longer, yet whose evidence, could he but give it, would be most vital to your cause. I am as ignorant of English law as a babe, and I apprehend you are scarcely wiser."

"Indeed, no, sir. I studied English jurisprudence closely for six months, but I doubt that seven years of Indian experience have gone a longish way towards blotting out all I learnt in that time."

"Good! Then we may consider ourselves a pair of innocents—twin children in ignorance—and the sooner you submit your case to somebody who does know something, the better. There is your friend Mr. Swinfen, for instance—you have confidence in him, have you not?"

"Perfect confidence."

"Very well. Then, if you take my advice, you will go straight to London, call upon Mr. Swinfen, give him a clear account of what has happened down here, and, if possible, bring him back with you, so that he may see that poor old man's condition with his own eyes, and hear—as he can hear from the servants in this house—the exact history of the midnight attack. There is no knowing how much a man of that kind might discover on the spot. A lawyer has an acquired aptitude for ferreting out ugly facts. I will keep the ground for you while you are away, and you need not fear the result."

I fully appreciated the wisdom of this advice, and though it went against me to leave the poor old man even for a day or two, I felt that my place was amply supplied by my father, towards

whom his dim eyes always turned—whose presence seemed an unspeakable solace to him.

My father, whose disposition was as eager by fits and starts as it was careless by habit, was anxious that I should start on this errand at once, but the coaches did not accommodate this impatience. There was one which left Warborough at day-break, and another at seven o'clock in the evening, and for this latter I determined to wait, though my father urged me to travel post.

"Nay, sir," I said, "to do that would be to invite more attention at Warborough than I care for, and would bespeak the urgency of my errand. We know not what creatures of his own Sir Everard Lestrangle may have in this neighbourhood, ready to send him news of my movements."

I waited therefore till the evening, and it will be seen in the upshot that my prudence chose the wrong course, as prudence is apt to do, upon occasions. I left the will in my father's keeping, and departed at five o'clock in the afternoon, without having been favoured with Mrs. Grimshaw's presence all day. She was ill, the maid told us; and I do indeed believe that Roderick Ainsleigh's return had been an overwhelming shock to her senses. I had given notice of my departure to no one, and, when the time came, went quietly downstairs, and along the darksome passages that led to the little side-door by which I had entered. On my way here I made a discovery which caused me considerable surprise and some suspicion.

I had occasion to pass the half-open door of an apartment which, although properly the still-room, was now used as a kitchen. I looked in, thinking to say a word or two to Mrs. Betty before leaving, when to my extreme surprise I beheld the pedlar, who had been my fellow-traveller from London, seated by the fire smoking, with a tankard on the table at his elbow.

The room was somewhat dark even at noonday, the narrow windows being overshadowed by a high wall which stood a few yards from them, and at this hour it had scarce any light save that of the fire; but I could hardly mistake my gentleman, whose physiognomy—or rather whose nose and beard, for those only was I permitted to see, had made so strong an impression upon my mind. There the man sat, with the glow of the low fire crimsoning his figure—a greasy-looking velvet cap worn low upon his brow, his head sunk upon his breast in a meditative, or it may be simply lazy, attitude.

I did no more than peep in at the door and call Mrs. Betty to me. She was baking bread in a little room beyond the kitchen, and came to me with her hands floury.

"Who is that man?" I asked.

"A pedlar that sold my mistress a gown the other day,"

"What brings him here—in this house?"

"My mistress's charity," answered Betty, with a grin. "She is not commonly so compassionate, but this fellow is one of your pious customers—an out-and-out Methody—and I suppose that came over her. He had been ill, and was footsore, and she gave him leave to rest here a day or two. He sleeps in one of the empty garrets over the stables, and comes in here for his victuals."

"A strange fancy!" I said. "I should think Sir Everard Lestrangle would scarce care to have his house turned into a phalanstery for the accommodation of such gentry. How long has the fellow been here?"

Betty began to count upon her fingers—"Wednesday—Thursday—why, he came the night before you did, Mr. Robert, after dark, and worried me till I let him see my mistress. I was loth to take her his message, and expected a fine scolding, but she was more civil than usual, and said she knew Mr. Barnabas—that's his name, Barnabas—was a worthy man, and if she could lay out a trifle with him she would; and then she had him into the parlour to talk to her, and I suppose he told her some rare pitiful story, for by-and-by she came out and told me I was to provide him with a lodging for a day or two, till he got stronger."

Betty had conducted me some way along the passage before making this communication, which she imparted to me—even at that distance from the subject of it—in a cautious undertone.

"'Tis a curious business altogether, Betty," said I, "but I have my own opinion about it, nevertheless."

The good creature shook her head solemnly, as if she fully understood and coincided with me.

My own opinion was that the bearded pedlar was a spy, and a creature of Sir Everard's. I ran upstairs again, told my father, still in French, what had happened below, and counselled him to be on his guard against any tricks this gentleman might attempt in my absence; and then, having lost too much time already, went down again, examined the door, and finding that it was locked as closely as the door of a gaol, was fain to call Mrs. Betty once more from her bread-making and request her to let me out.

She was astonished at my departure.

"You're not going away for good and all, Master Robert, sure to goodness!" she exclaimed.

"No, Betty, I am going to Warborough on business," I answered, coolly; "but as I may not be able to get back to-night, you had best not sit up for me." I think she would have remonstrated had I given her time, but I was in haste to be gone, and hurried off before she could question me further.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## I FIND MYSELF IN GREAT PERIL.

I HAD intended to look in upon my foster-mother, to acquaint her with the progress of events at the great house, and to charge myself with any special message which she might wish conveyed to Margery, but it was now too late for this visit, which would have taken me out of the directest way to the town. I walked off, therefore, towards a path that crossed the park and wood beyond, and then emerged upon a common—a vast waste of undulating turf dotted with furze bushes, with treacherous patches of swamp in the hollows, and here and there a reedy pool, and here and there a cluster of scraggy firs lifting their black ragged heads to the sky.

Beyond this common lay the high-road between London and Warborough, and I thought that if I was a few minutes late for the starting of the coach, I should have a chance of meeting it here.

It was a gloomy evening, and a gloomy walk. The sun had not shown himself all day, and the gray light was thickening even when I started. A blue-white vapour crept slowly up from the grass, until it spread itself over all the landscape like a sheet of still water; and this vapour, ghostlike and impalpable as it was, struck a deadly dampness and chill to my very bones. I wrapped the cape of my riding-coat round me, and hurried on at as rapid a pace as I could command, heartily wishing myself snugly ensconced in the corner of a postchaise, rather than a solitary pedestrian in a damp wood. I was very glad when I found myself clear of those labyrinthine walks beneath my ancestral elms and beeches, and on the edge of the common.

By the dim evening light, the prospect here appeared much wider than I would have cared to behold. 'Twas long since I had crossed Chippering Common, as the place was called, and I began to apprehend that I might go astray in that vast track of hollows and hillocks, and thus miss the coach—as I must inevitably miss it—if I lost any time on my way to the high-road. I looked in vain for any friendly light in the distance to guide my doubtful steps. Had I been in the interior of Bengal, the scene could scarce have seemed more lonely. Not a living creature was visible. I heard a sheep-bell faintly tinkling, a long way off, and that one solitary sound was all that broke the silence of the dull-gray night.

There was nothing for me to do but make a dash for the high-road, crossing the common at right angles, and taking care not to be deceived by the undulating character of the ground.

I went along at a rattling pace, keeping as well as I could to the upper levels, and always looking ahead for the lights of the town.

I had walked upwards of a mile, when I did at last perceive a feeble twinkle in the distance—one solitary ray—which I took to proceed from the turnpike that stood about half a mile out of Warborough, on the London Road.

"I can scarce do wrong to make for the turnpike," I said to myself, and so steered my course in that direction.

I felt with some vexation that I was beginning to flag. I had walked at a good pace up to this time, but my strength was well-nigh exhausted, and I was painfully reminded of my affectionate Margery's tender warnings. 'Twas not so long since I had risen, the veriest ghost of my former self, from a sick bed. And this was the first time I had attempted to walk any distance since my recovery. I began to feel that I had done a foolish thing in being thus unmindful of my condition, and to regret sorely that I had not taken my father's advice and hired a postchaise to convey me straight to London.

Those long days and nights of continuous watching in the sick chamber had not been without their effect upon me. I felt a kind of muddled sensation in my brain, which made me at times inclined to fling myself down upon one of the furzy hillocks and rest, at any hazard. My eyeballs ached for want of sleep, and my mind kept going over the same things with senseless iteration.

I was altogether in a very sorry condition, when I turned round upon the summit of a little knoll and saw that I had been followed.

I say I saw that I had been followed; for, from the moment when first I caught sight of two dusky figures bearing down upon me through the gloom, no doubt was in my mind that they had been dogging my heels all the way across the common, and that they meant evil by me. My hand instinctively flew to my pistols, and I stood still at the top of the hillock with my face towards these two figures, prepared for the worst.

They stopped short on seeing me front them thus on my elevated ground. They had doubtless calculated upon dropping on me in a convenient hollow.

I heard them whisper together, saw them pause to look round, and then, seeing me still planted motionless and waiting for them, they came towards me. As they advanced I recognized the shorter of the two. It was the bearded pedlar. The other was a bulky scoundrel, in a smock-frock; a villain that looked as if he had received his education in the village stocks.

"What are you dogging me for, fellows?" I exclaimed, cocking my pistol.

'Twas the rustic ruffian who answered me.

"I suppose we've as good a right to cross the common as you sir," he said.

The pedlar had retreated to a respectable distance, with a hon-

skip, and jump, evidently startled by the click of the hammer, when I cocked my pistol; but the other ruffian came boldly on.

"What do want with me?" I asked; "if you come another step forward I shall fire."

"Will you?" roared the rascal, who was armed with a bludgeon, which he now swung aloft in his right hand, while with his left he grasped me by the cravat.

Before his hand touched me I had pulled the trigger, aiming at his head; but the pistol snapped, and in the next moment it was wrenched from my grasp and flung away into space.

Weak as I was, I did not surrender without a struggle. I wrestled furiously with my brutal foe, but in vain. The bludgeon descended upon my uncovered head—my hat having fallen off in the beginning of the scuffle—and I sank senseless to the ground; but not before I had made a discovery in that uncertain light which all my efforts had failed to accomplish in broad day. The pedlar sprang forward to give his accomplice a hand when he saw me well-nigh overpowered, and grasped me round the neck from behind just as the ruffian raised his bludgeon in front. I turned suddenly, distracted by this unexpected attack, and brought my face close against the countenance of this scoundrel, who in that moment I perceived to be no less a person than Mr. Blade, the rascal attorney of Little Britain.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself lying on a heap of mouldy-smelling straw, in darkness, but above me I could just descry the glimmer of starlight through the chinks in the roof that covered me. 'Twas by this I first perceived that I was lying under some rude kind of shelter.

For some time I lay quiescent, in a semi-stupor, with a vague sense of aching bones and a battered skull. 'Twas cold, and by some brute instinct I snuggled closer in the tumbled straw which composed my couch. Little by little, a more perfect consciousness returned, with all its pains and cares.

Where was I? I felt too weak to rise and seek the satisfaction of my curiosity on this point. I think I must have lain thus for more than an hour, helpless, and wondering what had befallen me. But at last, with an effort, I dragged myself up and began to explore my quarters. I found myself in some small square shed, which might be either stable or hovel, and after infinite trouble discovered a door, fastened by a rough wooden latch, which I lifted, and emerged upon the common.

The mists had vanished, and the stars were shining faintly, paled by a lurid light in the east—the light of swift-coming day. I must have lain for near a dozen hours in that dismal hut, which on inspection I found to be the deserted abode of some turt-burner.

I felt for my watch. It was gone, and my pockets had been rifled of all their contents, except a latch-key, and a few loose papers of no significance. I was penniless. For some minutes

I stood still to deliberate what I had best do—go back to Hauteville in this wretched plight, and send a messenger with a letter for Mr. Swinfen, entreating him to come to me? To do that would involve delay, and Swinfen might hardly credit so wonderful a story as I had to tell, unless I was at hand to explain the details. Again, whom could I trust to perform such an errand? To wait for the post would be too long a business. No; after a full consideration of the circumstances, I made up my mind to go on. Weak and penniless though I was, I would find some means of finishing my journey before nightfall.

The attack that had been made upon me was doubtless part of some deep-laid scheme, hatched by Everard Lestranger; and I marvelled considerably that his ruffian hireling should have hesitated to make an end of me when he had me in his grip.

"'T would have accorded better with his master's pleasure had he made a clean finish of the business while he was about it," I said to myself. "Indeed, 'tis likely enough he did leave me for dead on yonder heap of straw."

I was happily not very far from the high-road, I could see Warborough Church steeple on my left hand, in the clear morning light. On my right lay, as I believed, the turnpike, and towards this I directed my steps. I had a massive chased gold ring on my little finger, which had escaped the attention of my assailants, and which I fancied might serve to bribe some friendly waggoner to give me a lift as far as London.

I doubt not that I looked a ghastly figure as I waited by the roadside for such an opportunity. A waggon laden with trusses of hay came rumbling along after a little time. I hailed the man, and asked him how far he was going.

"To Shoreditch, in London," he answered, staring at me with all his might.

On this I told him my condition, and asked whether he would carry me to town, and set me down by the Temple, when I could pay him in coin, if he cared to wait while I fetched some money from my chambers. But if he doubted my honour, I would give him the ring from my finger as a guarantee of payment, whenever he could contrive to call upon me.

The rustic grinned and scratched his head meditatively.

"The ring may be brass, for aught I know about it," he said.

"I've seen a mort of such at Newberry fair, for sixpence a-piece. But you look like a gentleman, and I'll trust you as far as the valey of a ride goes. If you can travel a-top o' that there hay, I'll carry you to London before nightfall, and set you down hard by the Temple; and I'll wait upon you to-morrow morning for any trifle you may please to give me."

"Spoken like a generous-hearted fellow!" said I. "Be sure you shall not lose by your confidence."



"But I say, maister, why don't thee travel by the coach? She's quicker than my waggon."

"I daresay she is, friend. But I'd rather ask a favour of a simple-hearted fellow like you than of a London-bred coachman."

I mounted the waggon, and flung myself on the top of the closely-packed trusses, in which elevated position I fell asleep with the cape of my coat thrown over my face, and slumbered more sweetly than I had done for months. 'Twas mid-day when we got to Slough, where my friend the waggoner insisted upon my sharing his dinner of cold boiled pork, bread, and small beer—a hospitality which I accepted as frankly as it was proffered. We jogged on at a slow but steady pace all the afternoon and evening, and it was about eight o'clock when I beheld the lights of London looming through a thick fog. I was set down hard by the Temple towards nine, after an uneventful journey, heartily pleased with myself for having pushed on so obstinately.

I went straight to my chambers, intending to wash myself and change my clothes before waiting upon Mr. Swinfen, whom I should have to seek at his West-end residence; but I had scarce put my key in the door—the ruffian who robbed me had been obliging enough to leave me this convenience—when a man emerged from the obscurity of the landing and laid his hand upon my arm, while a second stranger appeared, as if by magic, on the other side of me.

"Mr. Robert Ainsleigh," said the first, as I stared in amazement from one to the other, "I arrest you as my prisoner in the King's name."

"Arrest me?" I exclaimed indignantly; "why, I owe no man a shilling!"

"Who talked about owing, Mr. Innocence?" cried the constable; "I arrest you for the wilful murder of Sir Everard Lestrangle, Baronet, of St. James's Square."

I staggered as if I had been shot.

"The murder of Everard Lestrangle!" I echoed. "Is Sir Everard Lestrangle dead?"

"Come, I say, sir," said the constable sharply, in a professional tone, "it won't do to sham innocence with us; and anything you say now can be used agen you by-and-by. You'd better slip the bracelets on him, Jim."

The fellow on my left side produced a pair of handcuffs, which they insisted upon putting on me; nor was I in any condition to hinder them. I submitted meekly enough, and only entreated the constable to tell me what had happened to Sir Everard Lestrangle.

"He was foully murdered at one o'clock this morning, outside Mrs. Hunter's lodgings in Surry Street."

"But why, in the name of Heaven, fix so awful a crime upon me?"

"For more reasons than one, Mr. Ainsleigh; as you'll find out when you hear the evidence agen you. First and foremost, you was his notorious enemy, and was known to have fought a duel with him, and been worsted. Secondly, you was his wife's old sweetheart; that's reason number two, and a good 'un. Thirdly, you was sweetheart of the lady he was following when he came by his end; ~~that's~~ that's reason number three, and a still better one. Lastly, and ~~thally~~ finally, he was stabbed through the heart by a dagger belnging to you; that's reason number four, and a clincher."

The dagger—Jehangeer's dagger—which I had left upon Margery's work-table.

"He is dead, then?" I said, like a creature in a dream.

"Deader than door-nails," answered the constable, coolly; "cut off in the flower of his youth, like a green bay-tree. But he'd lived an uncommonly rackety life, and had had his pennorth out of this world; that's a comforting reflection!"

After some persuasion, and my assurance that I would make no attempt to escape, these two gentlemen consented to remove my handcuffs while I went into my chambers to collect such clothes and other necessities as I was likely to require in prison, whither I was to be carried immediately. While I was getting these things together, the constable, who was of a communicative disposition, informed me that there had been a coroner's inquest upon the body of Sir Everard Lestrangle that morning; and that Mrs. Hunter being in a distracted state, and too ill to give her evidence, her woman had been interrogated instead, and had unwillingly admitted that the dagger with which the victim was slain belonged to me. She had noticed it hanging over the chimney-piece at my chambers, when she had been there in attendance on my mistress. She had admitted also that I was her mistress's lover, and on bad terms with Sir Everard, who had for some time past persecuted Mrs. Hunter with his addresses. Another important witness against me had been Major Blagrove, who told the story of my assault upon Sir Everard with a horsewhip, and the duel which followed it.

"Upon which the jury, with scarce a minute's consideration, pronounced their verdick — Wilful Murder against Robert Ainsleigh," concluded my informant.

"But what was there to connect me with the crime, except the dagger which I left at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings last Sunday night?" I asked. "No one saw me near the spot at the time of the murder. It would, indeed, have been impossible for any one to do so since I spent last night in

Berkshire, and had come straight from that county when you seized me just now."

"Did you come by coach—or po'shay?" inquired the constable.

"By neither. I travelled on the top of a hay-waggon."

"A curious way for a gentleman to travel!" said the constable, dubiously.

"Thereby hangs a tale," I replied, "which I can explain when I am called upon to do so."

The constable coughed the cough suspicious or ironical, wherewith such gentry are prone to express their disbelief in any given statement.

"An *alibi's* well enough in it's way," he said, "if it will hold water. But a weak *alibi* means Tyburn. And travelling a-top of a hay-waggon is a devilish weak *alibi*. Do you think you could find the waggoner at a push?"

"I suppose so," I answered carelessly enough, for I had as yet scarce realized the horror of my own position. I could think only of that one stupendous fact—Everard Lestrangle was dead! "I should know his face well enough."

"But you don't know his name, or the name of his master, eh?" asked the constable.

"No."

"Nor the inn where he puts up?"

"He was going on to Shoreditch—that's all I know."

"Why, then, your *alibi* isn't worth a pinch of snuff!" exclaimed the constable, helping himself from a battered metal box as he spoke. "There's no knowing what a good lawyer may do for you, but your hay-cart won't save your neck, Mr. Ainsleigh. Come, sir, 'tis time we were off. It puts the governor out of humour for folks to be coming in wanting beds at outlandish hours. You'd best bring all the ready money you can lay your hands upon."

I had luckily upwards of fifty pounds lying in my desk, in notes and gold, and this I transferred to my pocket, after giving the constable and his underling a guinea a-piece, as a reward for their civil treatment of me.

Sweetened by this fee, they were kind enough to arrange my cloak so as to conceal my handcuffs, lest, even in the dark courts through which we had to pass on our way to a hackney-coach, those decorations might attract the eye of the passer-by. On coming out into Fleet Street, we were fortunate enough to find an empty coach hard by Temple Bar and into this I was politely handed by my companions, who took their seats, one beside me, and the other opposite, with his back to the horses.

Once, as we rode along, it flashed upon me that this business might be only some new plot of Sir Everard's—the story of his death a villainous invention; and these two men his creatures, who were about to convey me into some novel kind of bondage

—on board ship, perhaps, to serve my King and my country before the mast.

I was not long in doubt, for we were soon at the gate of the prison, where I was admitted, after certain formalities to which I paid no attention. I need not dwell upon the discomforts of that night, which were less than I should have supposed inevitable in such a hideous situation as mine. I found the gaol filled with a motley company—men and women, youth and age, wretches innocent of every crime except poverty and its twin-brother, debt, herding with forgers, coiners, and assassins. Gambling, drinking, and quarrelling were, I found, the common diversions of the place! and while the poor had to endure all manner of hardships, and stomach every species of contumely, the rich, as in a tavern, could call for whatever they desired, and found a ready indulgence for any humour, however vicious.

There were ladies here—or women whose dress and bearing might fairly give them a claim to such a title; nor was beauty wanting in this strange assemblage. Nay, I beheld more than one youthful countenance of so fresh and innocent an expression, that I could but wonder what extraordinary accident had brought its owner into such a scene. But, upon inquiring of a civil neighbour, I found that in each case the accident was felony, and that the engaging young woman, whose simplicity I had compassionated, was among the vilest of her sex.

Not on the first night of my incarceration, however, did I observe these things. I passed through the indiscriminate crowd, seeing nothing, hearing nothing; for the figures around me seemed less distinct than the phantoms which Dante beheld in the under-world. I imagine that the constable had communicated the fact of my being decently provided with ready money to the governor, for that official received me with considerable civility, offered me a private room, which I could enjoy for the modest sum of half-a-guinea a night, and strongly recommended me a bowl of punch to put me in spirits.

I informed him that my spirits were, at the present moment, rather bewildered than depressed, but begged him to order a bowl of punch, at my expense, for the refreshment of himself and the constable, if he were not too proud to drink with that functionary.

“I am too proud to drink with no men,” replied the governor; “and there has gone out of this world many a decent fellow with whom I hobnobbed the night before his execution. It is amazing how small a difference a criminal career makes in a man’s manners, and how pretty a fellow your forger or highwayman may be, in spite of his peccadilloes.”

It is not to be supposed that I slept very soundly that night, though my bed was better than I had expected to find it.

The position in which I found myself was one which would, I conceive, have filled most men with horror, but I had not yet

realized the fact that I might be in actual danger. I must confess that my dominant feeling, throughout a long and thoughtful night, was a guilty satisfaction in the fate that had befallen my enemy. Yes, vile as it may seem, I must confess the truth. I was glad that Everard Lestrang was dead. He who had so insolently defied my vengeance had succumbed to the Great Avenger. He was dead, and Dora was free. It was not possible for me to consider one fact without thinking of the other. She was free. Never to be mine, divided from me as widely as ever—and oh! how bitterly I now regretted the impulse that had given my faith to another—but released from a bondage that she had admitted to be hateful. Could I be less than glad, for her sake?

"I will not rob her of Hauteville," I said to myself, my thoughts reverting to the subject of the recovered will; "the old place shall be her dower-house: and when I am far away in India, sleeping under my tent, it will be sweet to me to think of her dear figure in the familiar rooms where we were once so happy. If I can but persuade my father to remain in England, I will make her known to him, and he shall be the friend and guardian of her young widowhood. I can fancy those two would love each other; for her tender, clinging nature needs some stronger mind on which to lean."

The picture was pleasing, but in the next moment I laughed aloud at my own folly. "Fool!" I said to myself, "can you suppose that a lovely woman, left a widow at five-and-twenty, and whose heart has never yet been satisfied, will find no better consolation than such company as you would choose for her? Do you imagine that the future is to be blank for her because you have bestowed yourself elsewhere? She may accept your generous offer freely enough, perhaps; and when you come back to England, after ten years' exile, and revisit Hauteville, you will doubtless find her at the side of her chosen husband, and with a bevy of fair sons and daughters calling her mother."

The notion filled me with extreme bitterness; yet what right had I to wish her fate less happy?

Not once during that night did I seriously consider my own situation or its possible issues. The accusation brought against me seemed so preposterous in its nature, that I did not take the trouble to analyze it, satisfied that when the fitting time arrived I could easily demonstrate my innocence.

The next day was a dreary one. The early part of the morning I spent in writing letters in a small apartment off the public room, of which the governor informed me I might secure the sole use for a consideration. I should have been willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of privacy, even in this darksome den, which was lighted only by one narrow-barred window looking into a covered passage.

I wrote first to my father, informing him what had befallen

me, and entreating him to keep his post at Hauteville, and watch our mutual interest there, rather than to alter his plans from any uneasiness on my account. My situation was, I admitted, an unpleasant one enough, but I did not doubt I should ultimately escape from my present entanglement. My second epistle was to Mr. Swinfen, relating the discovery of Lady Barbara's will, and requesting him to go to my father at Hauteville without delay, and begging him at the same time to send me a trustworthy attorney, versed in criminal business, who could take my case in hand. I wrote one other letter, consisting of but a few lines, to my poor Margery, telling her where I was, and beseeching her to be of good cheer, and to trust as implicitly as I did myself in that Providence which, I felt assured, would deliver me. These letters I despatched as soon as written, by a safe hand. I roamed about the prison yard, staring idly at the miscellaneous inmates, and talking a little with some of the most decent-mannered of my companions in misfortune. The place was not unprovided with amusement—or rather debauchery—of the lowest kind. There was much gambling, more drinking, and wrangling, and abusive language prevailed on every side. Whatever mask these people might employ to cover their vices in better company, was here cast aside, and naked human nature frankly displayed itself in all its native ugliness. For a painter of manners with pen or pencil, like Fielding or Hogarth, there was here ample material.

I dined at the governor's table, in common with the wealthier of the prisoners, who were not in every instance the more refined in manners or appearance. There was a fat old woman in a greasy brocaded sack, and a satin petticoat trimmed with ragged lace, whose professional occupation 'twas scarce difficult to guess. Seated over against this lady was a gentleman whose person and manner alike smacked of the road; while his next neighbour I judged, from the bent of his conversation, to be attached to the honourable fraternity of coiners. On my right hand there sat a young creature of barely twenty years, whose slovenly dress could not disguise her beauty, and who frankly owned to having stabbed her lover to death in a brawl at an Islington tea-garden.

Amongst these ladies and gentlemen the conversation was of the liveliest, and I have seen many duller dinner-parties where the guests were in full enjoyment of their liberty. Various kinds of strong drink were circulated freely, and it must be confessed that the sprightliness of this circle was of that factitious order which owes its life to spirituous liquors. The table was hardly cleared when the highwayman and the coiner clubbed together for a bowl of punch, to which expense I was invited to contribute. We paid on the nail for all we took, credit being against the rules of the establishment, though I believe it was granted in some exceptional cases. I discovered that the com-

sumption of this famous punch was a source of much profit to the governor, and that the prisoners drank for the sake of putting him in good humour, as well as from an unaffected love of drinking.

In the course of the afternoon the governor came into the room, where I sat brooding by the fire, and informed me that I was to be taken before the magistrate next morning, when the witnesses would be re-examined, and I should be, in all probability, committed for trial.

As he had shown himself amazingly civil to me, I ventured to ask him to give me a clear account of the particulars of the crime of which I stood charged, or to lend me a newspaper containing a report of Sir Everard's murder.

The governor seemed with difficulty to stifle a laugh. "What!" he exclaimed, "between friends, now, do you positively pretend to be ignorant of this business? You may be sure, sir, that I should think no worse of a man of honour for sticking a scoundrel that had wronged him. And 'twas about a woman, too! Anything is honourable where a woman's concerned."

"Honourable or dishonourable, sir, I pledge you my word, as a Christian who fears his God, that I had no hand in the murder of Sir Everard Lestrangle; nor do I know the full particulars of his fate to this hour."

I had hardly spoken when the door was flung open, and a woman rushed in—a woman whose hood fell off as she ran towards me, revealing a pale, haggard face, from which the unpowdered hair was brushed back tightly, and fastened in a knot behind. It was Margery. She did not fall into my arms, or sob, or shriek, after the ordinary manner of women, but grasped both my hands, looking in my face with an earnest, searching gaze.

"Robert," she exclaimed, "I will save thee, or die with thee!"

"God forbid thou shouldst do the last, dear girl," I answered, touched by her fervour. "Nor do I believe my circumstances so desperate as you may perchance imagine them, in your affectionate concern for my safety."

The governor at this point discreetly left us alone together, retiring silently, and closing the door behind him.

"Alas! Robert, my heart misgives me. I fear thou art in danger. The dagger—your dagger. That speaks so loud against you. How, in pity's name, came you to part with it?"

"I left it in your room, on Sunday night."

"In my room?"

"Yes, on the work-table by the window."

"You left it there—and I never saw it? What a misfortune! I was so busy all the early part of the week with a new character Mr. Garrick sent me, that I never went near the work-table; and Hannah, my woman, is idleness itself, or she must needs have found the dagger in her dusting. But, oh! Robert, who could have taken it?"

"Who, indeed, my dear?"

I had all manner of people in and out of my room between Sunday and the night of the murder; but no one I could suspect of stealing that dagger."

"Tell me the history of the murder, Margery. That may perchance give me some clue to the assassin."

"As much as I know of it, Robert; and that is but little. Is it possible, though, that you have not heard all the particulars?"

"I have heard scarcely anything, my dear. When I questioned the governor of this place, just now, he evidently regarded my inquiry as an artful affectation of ignorance, by which I designed to demonstrate my innocence."

"Oh, what a wicked world this is!" cried the poor girl indignantly. "Can any human creature be so vile in his own nature as to look in your face and believe you a murderer?"

"Alas! my dear, if the countenance is to be the index of innocence, there are many in this place whose faces bear a fairer guarantee than mine, and many outside these walls who ought to be straightway handed over to the hangman. But the murder, Margery. How did that villain come by his doom?"

"All I know, Robert, is this much. He had been in the green-room that evening with his friend, Major Blagrove, and hanging about the side-scenes during the whole of the performance; but he had spoken to me less than usual—had, in fact, scarce approached me, except to wish me good-evening. Mr. Garrick was ill at Hampton, or Sir Everard would scarcely have been allowed to remain so long behind the scenes, for he always discourages idlers of that kind. He was there till the play was over, and then I suppose preceded me to Surry Street, whither I came, as usual, in a hackney-coach, as soon as I had changed my dress. I know not by what accident it happened, but by some mischance I left the street-door unlocked, although I have been in the habit of securing it every night, as I am the last to come in. I had not been ten minutes in the house before Sir Everard Lestrange walked into my room."

"The infernal villain!"

"Ay, Robert, I question if there is any epithet too vile for him. I will not repeat what passed at that interview. Supplication, threatenings, insolence, and brutality on his side, and on mine only scorn. "I never loved you," I told him, "not even when I was so weak and wicked as to trust myself to your honour." Had I been in the wretch's power, I know not to what infamy he might have descended, but I had Hannah close at hand, and a house full of defenders at my call. I entreated him to leave me, for you may conceive, Robert, that I scarcely dared call any one to turn him out of my room, lest he should revenge himself by blasting my reputation, as he distinctly threatened. The whole scene occupied something less than an



hour. At the last he lost all command of himself, burst into a torrent of invective, and rushed from the room. I listened at the head of the staircase, and was rejoiced to hear him leave the house, slamming the street-door behind him. But I had scarce returned to my room when I heard an awful groan from the street below, and flinging up the window, I beheld Everard Lestrangle lying on the pavement but a few paces from the door-step. The street is villanously lighted, as you know, but I did just descry a flying figure disappearing round the corner opposite, and I cannot doubt this was the assassin."

"Had the dead man been robbed?"

"No; his watch and a purse full of guineas were found upon him when he was carried into the parlour beneath my lodgings. A surgeon was sent for immediately, and came within five minutes, but he was quite dead. The dagger had pierced his heart. Oh, Robert, conceive my feelings when they showed me the weapon, and I recognized in it that very Indian dagger which I believed you had carried with you on your journey! I had just enough presence of mind to keep silence: but the precaution was vain, for that foolish Hannah betrayed you at the inquest."

"My dearest, the truth is best," I answered quietly; "and as I am utterly innocent of this crime, I have very little fear but that Providence will contrive my justification. I entreat you, therefore, to be calm, my dear girl, and to hope for the best."

"Am I not calm, Robert?" exclaimed Margery, regarding me with the serene air of a martyr whose spirit soars above the moral torture of stake or wheel; "am I not calm? But it is the tranquillity of desperation. Oh, my love, my love, innocent men have been sacrificed before to-day! Providence does not always interfere. And if I cannot save you——"

Her fortitude gave way at this point, and she burst into hysterical sobs; but when I rose to summon assistance, she checked herself with a heroic effort of the will.

"No, Robert, pray do not call any one. Let us be alone together while we can. We have so much to talk about. I will not torment you again with these cowardly tears. But, oh, my dearest, do not be too secure. Your innocence has to be proved. We must think, Robert—we must act. The law is pitiless. They will give us scant leisure in which to find the real criminal; and if we cannot find him——"

She shuddered, and clutched my hand convulsively—with fingers that were cold as death. There was half a bottle of wine on the table, the remains of a bottle I had ordered after dinner. I poured out a glassful, and persuaded Margery to drink it. Then stirred the fire into a blaze, and drew her chair closer to the narrow hearth.

"Come," I said cheerfully, "you must take a dish of tea with

me, Madge. You have no idea how comfortable they can make a man in this kind of place. Do you act to-night?"

"Yes," she answered, with a deep sigh. "They had to change the piece last night on my account, for I was really too ill to appear. But I have no such excuse to-night—and the play is *Jane Shore*. Mr. Garrick vows he shall be ruined if I play him false. I am bound to appear, Robert; but, oh! you cannot imagine how I dread facing the public, now that this horrible story has doubtless got abroad. Think how the town must have bemauled my wretched name since yesterday morning! That horrible story of the wager——"

"The wager!" I exclaimed, "what do you mean, Margery?"

"What!" she cried, "did you not hear of Major Blagrove's evidence before the coroner. He had been with Sir Everard behind the scenes, he said, and it had been settled between them that this night was to decide a wager that had long been pending. Oh! Robert, how can I speak the rest? That villain invited Major Blagrove to my rooms to supper at one o'clock. He had even gone so far as to order supper from a tavern in Fleet Street, which was brought to the door at the moment he lay bleeding in the parlour. 'By the time the clock strikes one,' he said, 'this paragon of virtue, this paradox in petticoats, an honest actress, will have consented to declare herself openly—what she has long been *sub rosa*—my mistress.' Those were his words, Robert, which Major Blagrove repeated to the coroner. He—the Major—entered Surry Street as the clock of St. Mary's struck one. He was in time to hear his friend's dying groan, but was too far away from my door when the deed was done to distinguish the person of the murderer."

"Margery," I cried passionately, "do you apprehend that Providence, which has inflicted such signal vengeance upon this villain, will permit an innocent man to suffer a shameful death?"

"Innocent men *have* suffered, Robert," she said, piteously; "I cannot forget that."

It was now five o'clock, and at seven Margery must be at the theatre. I rang for lights and tea, which were quickly brought, and with my own hands I poured her out a comfortable dish of this feminine beverage. But, though I affected an amazing cheerfulness myself, I could not succeed in raising her spirits.

"Think what I shall suffer, Robert," she exclaimed. "This night, when I look upon that sea of faces, and know that every creature among the audience is familiar with the story of the murder—and my share in the night's work. Heavens, what a hideous notoriety!"

Yes, verily, a hideous notoriety, and the subject of it—she, whose horrible adventure was the town-talk—was my plighted wife. Would the world believe a woman spotless about whom this vile wager had been laid? Would the world ever cease to

declare that *she* was on her account—and by a jealous lover—Everard Lestrangle had been murdered? Shame unutterable set the hot blood tingling in my face as I thought of our miserable position—miserable even should Providence release me from my present peril.

Happily there was India before us, and in that remote world no one need know my wife's history. Yet the next instant I told myself that however distant the scene of our lives, the secrets of our past would doubtless ooze out, sooner or later. There is always some one to remember and betray. Some one would recognize the gifted actress of Drury Lane in the lovely Mrs. Ainsleigh.

In spite of these involuntary bitter thoughts, I did my utmost to reassure Margery. "The world will think no worse of you, my dear," I said, "because your honour has been assailed by a scoundrel; and the world has been too long familiar with Sir Everard Lestrangle's character to be astonished by any new revelation of his infamy. Be assured that your reception to-night will be even warmer than usual—and act your best—and look your brightest—for my sake."

"For your sake, Robert," she repeated, with a profound sigh, "what is there that I would not do for your sake—what sacrifice that I would hesitate to make?"

She looked at me searchingly, with an earnest, penetrating gaze, and then turned from me with another sigh.

"My dearest, be comforted," I said; "I have a rooted conviction that all will go well. Nor can I help being even elated by the fact of this man's death. There is a hardened villain the less in the world."

"Snatched hence in so awful a manner, Robert," she answered gravely, "with not a moment for repentance!"

"'Twas not in that man's nature to repent; if it had been, God would have granted the opportunity."

The clock struck six, and she was forced to leave me.

"I shall drive straight to the theatre," she said; "pray for me to-night, Robert."

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### I BEGIN TO REALIZE MY DANGER.

MR. SWINFEN did not fail me in my hour of need. He sent a speedy answer to my letter, to tell me that he was off to Hauteville at once, as my story was so wonderful as to enlist all his curiosity, to say nothing of his friendship.

"I will now confess to you," he wrote, "that I always thought Lady Barbara meant to do something handsome for you, and that no one was more surprised than I when, by dying intestate, she left you unprovided for. 'Twas not like that dear lady to forget those she loved. Yet, when you called upon me, some months ago, I felt it my duty to discourage your suspicions of

Sir Everard Lestrangle, which seemed, in the face of the business, unjustifiable, and, if indulged in, would only, I thought, lead you into trouble. You may place full reliance upon my doing my utmost to see you righted in this business, and to prove the will, should it be as genuine a document as you suppose. In the meantime, I have engaged Mr. Oole, of Lyon's Inn, to attend to your interests in this other unhappy affair, and I have every hope that he will place you in the way of proving your innocence of this most odious crime. I must remind you that extremest candour in your dealings with this gentleman will best serve your cause. Mr. Oole will wait upon you the first thing to-morrow morning."

This gentleman was introduced while I was seated in my private apartment, making a pretence of eating a breakfast for which I had no appetite. He was a tall thin personage, with hollow cheeks, and a still hollower cough, and had been in a galloping consumption, as the governor afterwards informed me, for the last twenty years, or indeed as long as he had been a member of the legal profession, but had never grown any worse, or seemed any nearer death than at the outset.

"They call the fellow Old Churchyard in the Inns of Court," continued the governor; "but there isn't a better man alive to prove an *alibi*, or that can do it upon smaller grounds. He has cheated Jack Ketch of many a tip-top customer, I warrant you."

"I do not desire him to invent any lies on my behalf, sir," I answered sharply; "I only wish him to demonstrate the truth."

The governor shrugged his shoulders, as if in good-natured contempt for my folly in sticking so obstinately to an assertion of innocence which nobody could believe. But, to return to Mr. Oole, who, on being ushered into my room, stood contemplating me and my breakfast with a ghoulish air, as if wondering that I could relish anything less toothsome than a festering corpse.

"Will you join me, sir?" I said, pointing to the repast, which included a ham, a round of spiced beef, and a dish of eggs and bacon. The governor had supplied my table lavishly, no doubt with a view to swelling my bill.

"I thank you, sir, no; I never eat but twice a day: a substantial dinner at my chambers, at one, sent in from the nearest tavern—I am a bachelor, Mr. Ainsleigh—and a comfortable supper, partaken of at the same tavern, in the evening. Breakfast and tea are kickshaws which I despise."

"But it is late, sir; why not take a snack while we talk over our business, and call it luncheon?"

"When you put it in that commonsense manner, sir, I cannot refuse," replied Mr. Oole, seating himself with an air that evidently meant business. "In that case, I will begin with a rasher or two of bacon and three or four eggs. 'Tis a sin to see

good victuals getting cold, and I opine you will pay as much whether you eat or no."

"You may be very sure of that, sir. Shall I call for a fresh pot of tea?"

"The consumption of that drug, Mr. Ainsleigh, is a kind of dram-drinking which I leave to women. With your leave, I will take half a pint of small punch, or a pot of porter."

I rang for a pint of the former liquor, which was brought with the usual alacrity, yet before it appeared Mr. Oole had disposed of the rashers and eggs, and was cutting into the beef.

"Don't be afraid," he said to me, in a reassuring tone, "I mean to taste your ham presently. But pig upon pig is a bad kitchen. And now, sir, to business. I hope you will regard me in the light of a friend, and make a clean breast of it at the outset."

"Upon my honour, Mr. Oole, I have nothing to confide to the ear of friendship which I could not trust to the whole world," I replied.

"Come, sir, come, Mr. Ainsleigh, this is always the way of it. A gentleman in your position is always shy at the beginning. He forgets that, although his situation is novel to himself, it is in no manner strange to his lawyer, and that a hundred good fellows have been in the same dilemma. Come, sir, between man and man, we know what this kind of thing amounts to. A gentleman, whose honour is easily wounded, sees a favoured rival stealing away from the house of his mistress (you perceive, sir, I am not neglecting the ham). As ill-luck will have it, he happens to carry a dagger about him, and, in an evil moment, draws upon the traitor. A man might be immaculate in every other circumstance of his life, sir, and yet fall into this snare."

"You have a pleasant manner of smoothing the way to confession, Mr. Oole," I said, "but I have nothing to confess. I had no hand in the assassination of Sir Everard Lestrangle."

"Pray consider, Mr. Ainsleigh, that I can serve you twice as well if you treat me with candour. I would pledge my life this ham was cured in Yorkshire. There was saltpetre in the pickle. Candour, Mr. Ainsleigh, candour between a gentleman in your situation and his lawyer is half the battle."

"I will be as candid as you can possibly desire, Mr. Oole. I was away from London on the night of the murder."

"I should have preferred any other mode of defence to an *alibi*," murmured the lawyer, "it has been infernally over-done of late."

I proceeded to give him a careful and exact account of my adventures from the moment I left Hauteville House, until my apprehension at the door of my chambers.

"'Tis a strange story, Mr. Ainsleigh," said the lawyer, who had listened to me with profound attention; "and although I need scarce say that I myself place implicit credence in your word, it

is my duty to inform you that the whole thing has somewhat the sound of a romance, and I fear will so impress the jury."

"The jury, sir," I exclaimed; "do you apprehend the possibility of my being committed for trial?"

"Alas! my dear sir, I cannot see at present how we can hope to escape that issue."

I rose, and paced my narrow den, strangely disturbed by this avowal. Not till this moment had I conceived that my apprehension was anything worse than a temporary embarrassment, from which I should be set free as soon as my case was investigated before a magistrate. I was almost dumfounded on finding that Mr. Oole took so serious a view of my condition. After a few minutes' meditation, however, I argued with myself that this solemnity of his was only an assumption, designed to enhance the value of his professional services.

"You see, my dear sir," he continued presently, "on your own showing, you left Hauteville at five o'clock in the afternoon—or thereabouts. Now, may I ask you how far this Hauteville House is from London?"

"Five-and-thirty miles."

"Five-and-thirty miles. You left at five in the afternoon, and the murder was committed an hour after midnight. There was ample time for you to be in London, it would no doubt occur to the minds of the jury. You perceive, Mr. Ainsleigh, that I am bound to contemplate this matter from their point of sight."

"Of course. But by what conveyance was I to travel? If I had come by the coach, I should surely have been observed by some one?"

"That remains to be proved, sir. But even if we can demonstrate—as I hope we can—that you were not in the coach, it will be said that you might have found some means of providing yourself with a horse, or might have even walked the distance."

"What, sir; when I was not a month ago lying on a sick bed?"

"You had eight hours to do it in, sir; or, supposing that you should be unable to walk upwards of four miles an hour for eight hours at a stretch, there are all the possibilities of a lift on the road. The onus will be upon us to prove that you were lying senseless in that deserted hovel on Chippering Common. True, there is your waggoner, whom I must make it my business to find, and who can prove picking you up in the Warborough Road at seven o'clock in the morning after the murder; but what if the prosecution replies that there was ample time for you to have got from London to Warborough between one o'clock and seven o'clock, and that your appearance at that place, and return journey to London, were an artful contrivance to throw off suspicion."

"Good God, sir," I exclaimed impatiently, "what a tangle you are making of the business! Are you come here on purpose to show me that my case is hopeless?"

"No, sir!" he replied firmly; "but it is only by examining this business on its darkest side that I can make myself master of the situation. As I have implored you to be candid on your part, so shall I upon mine withhold from you no apprehension that I may feel on your behalf."

"You are right, Mr. Oole, and I beg you to excuse my petulance just now. You will own my position is a trying one?"

"No apologies, I pray, sir," said the attorney, with a stately wave of his hand. "Now it strikes me, that our best hope—I might almost say our only hope—is in this scoundrel Blade. I happen to know something of the fellow, and know him for a rascal that would stick at nothing. It is therefore no surprise to me to hear of him acting as spy on behalf of Sir Everard Lestrangle. His whole practice is of that order, and his reputed profession is but a mask, under which he performs all manner of dirty work. To convey bribes at an election, or to play the go-between for a profligate, comes alike to him."

"What can you hope from such a man?" I asked incredulously.

"Everything. His patron being dead, he has nothing further to expect in that quarter: and can we but make it worth his while, and assure his coming off scot-free himself, he will be ready enough, I fancy, to betray Sir Everard Lestrangle, and to confess his share in the attack upon you that night. As he did not strike you himself, he was only an accomplice after the fact, and, with my help, could doubtless contrive to wriggle out of any ill consequences of the transaction. There is but one circumstance against us."

"And that is——?"

"The fact that the fellow is such an arrant rogue that I doubt whether any jury will believe him. It will be so easy for the prosecution to fling discredit upon such a scoundrel."

"Then this hope you talk of is next door to no hope, Mr. Oole?" said I.

"I don't say that, sir. If I find your waggoner, as I hope to do, and get this man Blade to confess to the assault on the Common, and to leaving you half dead in the hovel at night-fall; the two facts will dovetail—and one strengthen the other—like a mitre-join in carpentry. No, Mr. Ainsleigh, on my honour, I do not despair of getting you off."

There was not very much encouragement in this assurance, and I began to think, with a strange sinking sensation at my heart, that I was, perchance, destined, after all, to end my days shamefully on the gallows. I saw the whole thing as in a picture, and thought even of what my friends in the East, Colonel Clive, Mr. Holwell, Mr. Watts, and others, would think when they heard this dismal story. What if circumstances were too strong for me, and I was caught in a net from whose meshes there was no escape?

Mr. Oole saw my gloomy brow, and endeavoured to cheer me.

"Come, Mr. Ainsleigh, keep up your spirits!" he exclaimed; "I have seen men much nearer Tyburn than you are, ay, within a few yards of the fatal tree, and yet come off scathless. Let us talk the business over in a comfortable, confidential way between man and man. It is quite clear that a man can't be murdered without there being somebody to murder him, as I suppose there is no good in proposing the hypothesis of suicide in this case."

"There is no question about that," I replied; "Mrs. Hunter saw a man escaping round the corner almost as Sir Everard fell."

"Mrs. Hunter might keep that knowledge to herself if we saw our way to transforming the murder into a suicide. But I am told, from the nature of the wound, which was at the back, under the left arm, it could scarce have been self-inflicted. Now, presuming the gentleman to have been murdered, pray, sir, does your knowledge of himself and his surroundings afford you any hint as to the identity of the assassin?"

"Not the slightest. I knew the gentleman himself well enough, and knew him to be a most consummate villain—'*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*,'" the lawyer complacently murmured.

"That sentence, sir, would apply to Nero, yet Tacitus does not spare him. Of Sir Everard's surroundings, however, I know nothing."

And you have no suspicion as to the murderer?"

"None whatever. The crime is, to my mind, one of the most mysterious I ever heard of. Indeed, it seems to me that there is but one way of accounting for it, and that is by the supposition that the assassin was a common robber, who meant to plunder his victim, but was frightened by the opening of Mrs. Hunter's window, or the appearance of Major Blagrove at the other end of the street."

"I can hardly think that, Mr. Ainsleigh: a common robber would scarce stab a man to the heart before rifling his pockets, and in such a place as Surry Street. Be sure the deed was inspired by revenge, and may perhaps have been perpetrated by a hired desperado. Is London so much more virtuous than Rome or Venice, that crimes should be unknown here? The gentleman had a beautiful wife, I am told;—who shall say that it was not her lover who prompted——"

"Stop, sir!" I cried angrily. "That lady is known to me, and is one of the noblest and purest among women. I must beg that you forbear any speculations that involve her good name. She is an angel, whose sole misfortune was to be mated with a villain."

The lawyer looked at me with a curious attention as I spoke, and in the next moment I regretted my precipitation. That insinuation about Dora so disgusted me with the man, that I felt now only eager to get rid of him.



"Your own wisdom must guide you in the conduct of this business, Mr. Oole," I said, "for I can give you no further assistance."

"I must do my best, sir," he replied, gravely; "I shall ask for a remand this afternoon, and it will go hard with me if I have not seen Mr. Blade before to-night. But I do not expect to get the better of that exemplary scoundrel in one interview; for however I may touch him by an appeal to his pocket, it will require time to subdue his caution, which will make him naturally averse from committing himself."

"With regard to funds, Mr. Oole?" I began.

"Mr. Swinfen has provided me with the sinews of war, sir. You need give yourself no uneasiness on that score. I have the honour to wish you a very good morning. We shall meet in court at one o'clock."

It was now nearly noon. I sat brooding over the fire for upwards of half an hour, infinitely more depressed than before the attorney's visit. He had presented my situation to me in a new light, and I now felt that the issue was something worse than doubtful. If this man, whose trade it was to disentangle this kind of knot, could not see his way to my deliverance, my case must indeed be desperate; and there had been that in Mr. Oole's manner which led me to conclude he saw very small ground for hope. Heaven knows, if this notion made me cast-down, 'twas not that I loved life so dearly for its own sake, for many a time since my illness I had reflected how heavy a burden of care and doubt would have been lifted off my shoulders if that sickness unto death had verily proved the closing scene. But to behold myself marked out from my fellow-men as a secret assassin, condemned to depart from this world by the most degrading exit, to know that my name for all time to come would be odious and execrated! This made a prospect not easy to contemplate with fortitude, and I felt for the time more stupefied than pained by the immensity of my new trouble. Yet, amid all selfish consideration of my own peril, one image reigned supreme in my mind. 'Twas that of Dora, widowed, alone, horror-stricken, and doubtless but too well convinced of my guilt.

"To go out of this world hated by all the human race besides, is less agonizing to my spirits than to know myself odious to her," I thought, in that bitter despairing half-hour, when I for the first time entertained the idea that I was abandoned by Heaven, and doomed to suffer for another man's crime.

At one o'clock I found myself in a stifling law court, to which the light of a dull autumn day could scarce enter through the smoky panes of two tall narrow windows, further obscured by the high wall which rose a yard or so beyond them. It is impossible to imagine a scene more gloomy, or a ceremonial less impressive. The magistrate shuffled through the investigation

with as indifferent an air as if the crime of which I stood charged had been the pettiest offence in the calendar. There were half a dozen cases in waiting, to come on after mine. Everybody seemed in a hurry, and it was as much as Mr. Oole could do to obtain time to cross-examine the witnesses against me.

These were Major Blagrove, Margery, Hannah Surfet, her maid-servant, a surgeon, and a couple of watchmen who carried the dead man into the lodging-house parlour in Surry Street. I need not recapitulate the evidence, which corresponded in every particular with the account I had already heard from Margery, although she of course refrained from any revelation of the nature of her interview with Sir Everard Lestrangle. He had paid her this midnight visit against her will, and had left her in anger. That was all she admitted, though close pushed by the lawyer for the prosecution.

"Upon my soul, madam," said this gentleman, in the course of her examination, "you are marvellously lucky to stand where you do, and not in the dock; for had not Major Blagrove seen his friend fall, and a man bolting round the corner, it might have been thought your own fair hand had made away with your importunate lover."

He pressed her hard after this for a description of the figure she had seen flying round the corner.

"Come, madam, such brilliant eyes as those must have seen clearer than you will acknowledge. Was the fellow tall or short, fat or thin? Was he not the same size as that gentleman yonder, the prisoner? Come, madam, now, in candour, was he not the same figure as the prisoner, to a T?"

"No, sir," cried Margery, in her spirited way, "he was no more like Mr. Ainsleigh than you; but the glimpse I had of him was so brief, the night so dark into the bargain, that I cannot take upon myself to say what he was like."

"Then he *may* have been like the prisoner?"

"I think not, sir; I believe I should have recognized *him* even by the briefest glance;" and she flung a tender look at me as she spoke.

Upon this the lawyer badgered her still further, scenting the secret of her attachment to me, and trading upon his knowledge; but he could extort nothing from her to my disadvantage. Indeed I believe this brave and generous soul would have perjured herself rather than make an admission that could be used against me.

Mr. Oole asked for a remand, which, after some parley, was granted, although I believe the magistrate would have felt more satisfaction in committing me at once. The examination was adjourned to the following week, and I was conducted back to my prison.

Here I received another visit next day from Mr. Oole, who

brought me no news from which I could extract comfort. He had been to Mr. Blade's chambers, but the gentleman had been denied to him by a dirty scrub of a boy, who was at once his clerk and body servant. On this he had set a watch upon the lawyer's den, but at present with no result. Nor had his search for the waggoner who brought me to London been as yet rewarded, though he had sent into Shoreditch to inquire among any corn-merchants whom his messenger could find in that neighbourhood.

"One cannot expect to succeed in this kind of business off-hand, Mr. Ainsleigh," he said cheerfully; "and I must implore you not to droop. I shall send a confidential person down to Warborough, to hunt for the waggoner, and I shall keep an eye upon Mr. Blade."

"Did you ask the clerk where his master had gone?"

"Yes, I examined the young vagabond closely, but could get little out of him. His master had gone into the country the day before, but he could not tell where. I asked him if he was positive it was yesterday his master went, and not several days ago, as I had good reason to believe; but the imp protested it was yesterday, and showed me a dirty sheet of paper stuck on the door with 'Back to-morrow' written on it in Blade's hand. 'Why, you Satan's imp!' I exclaimed, 'that paper is at least a week old.' But the rascal stuck to his text to the last gasp."

"Can you conjecture the man's motive for keeping out of the way?" I asked.

"Why, he is doubtless waiting to see how the land lies, and if it strikes him by-and-by that he can make money by coming forward and peaching upon his late employer, with safety to himself, you may be sure he will do it."

"Think you he is still at Hauteville, and ignorant of his patron's death?"

"No; for, after having disabled you that evening, his next business will bring him straight to London, to acquaint his employer with all that had taken place in Berkshire. I feel confident that he is hiding somewhere in this city, and it shall go hard with me if I do not unearth him."

This seemed to me poor comfort, but I was fain to be content with it. That afternoon brought me a friend in the person of my father, who had only waited at Hauteville to close the eyes of his old tutor, before hastening to my side.

"The poor soul expired the night before last, Robert," he told me, "gliding out of this troubled life at the last as peacefully as an infant. He died in my arms, and addressed me by my name in the last hour of his existence. Swinfen arrived at Hauteville some time before I left, and I gave the will into his keeping. He will obtain any evidence that is needful to be got down there."

"Did you see anything more of-Mrs. Grimshaw before you left?" I inquired.

"They summoned her when her husband was dying, and she came in and stood beside his bed, looking more like a ghost than a living creature, but we did not exchange a word. When the vital spark was fled, she stalked away again, gloomy and silent as a shade."

My father's presence gave me inexpressible comfort. That daring and sanguine spirit of his seemed to bring light and life into my prison. He had, or affected to have, no doubt as to the issue of affairs, and after we had once fully discussed my circumstances, he made no further allusion to the murder or to my situation, but brought me the news of the town every morning, and cheered me with his lively conversation.

During the week that passed before the adjourned examination, I was somewhat surprised to see but little of Margery, who only visited me twice in that interval, and then but for half an hour at a time. On each of these occasions she was deadly pale, and had the look of a person whose nights have been sleepless.

"You have your father's society, Robert," she said to me, somewhat sadly, "and can hardly miss my poor company."

"Indeed, you are wrong, Madge. I have missed your bright face sorely in this dreary den."

"It has well-nigh lost its brightness, now, Robert," she answered in the same serious tone. "Not that I am fearful about you, dear," she added hastily; "nay, do not think that. I have every hope of seeing your innocence exemplified."

I urged her to tell me the reason of her sadness—if it really did not proceed from any uneasiness on my behalf—but she would not satisfy me.

My father was present at my next interview with Mr. Oole, which took place on the morning before the examination. He had discovered the retreat of Mr. Blade the lawyer, in a low neighbourhood beyond Limehouse, where he had set up his household gods in a somewhat clandestine *ménage*.

Here Mr. Oole had stalked him with much difficulty; but although he nibbled at the bait, he was not yet to be tempted, and declared his ignorance of the attack made upon me, at the same time vigorously denying his identity with the bearded pedlar.

"I do not despair of bringing him to reason, Mr. Ainsleigh," said my champion, "between this and your trial."

"My trial, sir!" I exclaimed in a fever, "do you intend that I should be committed for trial?"

"Intend, sir! you may suppose that my intentions are of the best on your behalf; I would have you set at liberty to-morrow; but I fear that, under the present aspect of affairs, it will be impossible to hinder your committal."

I shuddered at the thought; to be committed for trial seemed to me almost as deep a disgrace as to be found guilty.

"Pray, sir," said my father, who had listened silently heretofore, with a serious but perfectly tranquil countenance, "by whom is this prosecution undertaken?"

"In the first instance, by the gentleman's family—his widow, rather, since he has no other family"—replied the lawyer; "and in the next place, the Crown, which, in consideration of the victim's elevated position, and the peculiar enormity of the crime, has offered an additional reward of £100 for the conviction of the murderer."

My heart grew cold at this intelligence. It was at her suit, then, that I had been seized as a felon; at her suit that I languished in this durance, from which the sole gate seemed to be death. I had never troubled myself to consider who was my prosecutor, and this revelation came upon me with doubled force on account of my previous indifference. My father was more thoughtful than his habit after Mr. Oole's departure, and left me in less than half an hour, promising to return in the evening. To my surprise, however, and not a little to my disappointment, he failed to keep his word, and I spent a melancholy night in solitude.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### I BECOME DEEPER IN DEBT TO MARGERY.

THE preliminary part of the examination was little more than a recapitulation of the evidence already given. Major Blagrove was somewhat more diffuse than before, and declared that the deceased had, after the duel between us, frequently spoken of me as his enemy, and protested that he went in danger of his life on my account. But this, after some squabbling between Mr. Oole and the lawyer for the prosecution, was rejected as not being evidence.

The fact of my assault upon Lestrangle with the horsewhip, and the challenge that followed it, was, however, admitted, as showing our previous relations; and I could see that this circumstance bore hard against me in the mind of the magistrate, who was but little disposed to be lenient.

The examination went on, and Mr. Oole seemed, I thought, to do no more in my behalf than to cavil at the examination in chief, and split straws with the prosecution. I began to wonder whether he had any witnesses to produce on his side, and my doubts were agreeably relieved at last by the appearance of the young waggoner who had brought me up to London the morning after the murder.

This young fellow my solicitor produced with an air of triumph, and proceeded to show, by his examination, that as I was at Harborough Turnpike at seven in the morning, I could hardly

have been in Surry Street at an hour after the previous midnight. To my horror, however, I perceived, by the drift of the prosecuting attorney's cross-examination, that this evidence on my behalf was next to valueless—nay, was likely to be damaging. For this gentleman dwelt so strongly on my ghastly and disordered appearance when the waggoner picked me up, my sleeping out the day a-top of his waggon, being evidently in a state of extreme exhaustion, and my eccentricity in preferring this waggon to the more ordinary mode of conveyance afforded by the coach, that he went a long way towards demonstrating that the whole business was a planned thing, designed to frustrate the ends of justice.

The cross-examination of this witness, who had innocently done his best to ruin me, was just over, and the countenance of my defender was growing momentarily more anxious, when I heard a clamour and bustle at the entrance to the court, and presently beheld a man borne in between two chairmen and carried to the witness-box. He was pale as death, and seemed in mortal agony, and so awful was the aspect he presented to my view, that some moments elapsed before I recognized in this death-stricken countenance the face of that harmless lunatic Johnson, the actor.

He was accommodated with a chair, and while this was doing I perceived that a letter was handed to my lawyer, which he tore open hastily, and perused with an attentive brow.

"This person is a most important witness for the defence, your worship," he said to the magistrate, "and after you have heard his evidence I shall beg leave to produce another, whose statements will confirm those of this gentleman."

"If he can do no more for your client than your Berkshire waggoner has done, sir, I think you had as good kept him out of the witness-box," replied the magistrate testily. "It is somewhat of an innovation to bring sick men into court, and I hope the result will justify the procedure."

"I have very little doubt of that, your worship."

There was something in Mr. Oole's manner, cool and deliberate as he tried to appear, that made me suspect the entrance of Mr. Johnson to be as great a surprise to him as it was to me. He referred to his letter again, and at this moment I saw my father enter the court for the first time, and take his stand a little way within the door, where he could see and hear all that took place. I had been wondering before this at his non-appearance among the spectators of a scene which concerned me so nearly.

The actor was sworn, and my defender began to interrogate him.

"You know something of this business, it seems, Mr. Johnson?"

"I know more about it than any man," answered the wretched being, who was propped up on one side by one of the men who had carried him in, and who, but for this support,

would evidently have fallen out of the chair in which he was seated. He spoke in so faint a voice, that it was not possible he could have been heard by any one at the back of the court.

"Perhaps you will be so good as to tell us what you know. There is this dagger, for instance, with which the deed was done." Mr. Oole pointed to my famous Indian dagger, which had been so mysteriously dyed in the blood of my enemy, and which had been produced in court at both examinations.

"Come, sir," continued Mr. Oole, "did you ever see that weapon before to-day?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Johnson; "I saw it a fortnight ago, on a Monday afternoon, at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings."

"On Monday afternoon—a fortnight ago—that would be Monday, the nineteenth of October, I think."

"Yes; 'twas the nineteenth of October."

"Upon my honour, sir, this is irrelevant," exclaimed the magistrate; "I cannot have my time wasted by such stuff as this."

"I must entreat your forbearance, sir; you will perceive presently that the questions I have been putting are not irrelevant. This witness saw the dagger at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings on Monday afternoon. The prisoner left London for Berks by stage-coach at daybreak on the same Monday, the nineteenth. I am in a position to prove that, and that he did not leave Berkshire till he was carried away by the witness you have just heard. The *alibi* is, I think, complete."

"How do you make that out, sir? The prisoner left Sir Everard Lestrangle's house at five in the afternoon, and was not picked up in the Warborough Road till seven next morning. He had time enough to be in London in the interim."

"That is a question of computation of time, sir, which cannot be gone into too nicely. But if I can disconnect my client from the weapon with which the deed was done, I feel sure you will admit that I have destroyed the chief evidence against him."

"Go on, sir," said the magistrate, in a surly tone.

"Come, now, Mr. Johnson," continued the lawyer, "pray, what led you to remark the dagger?"

"Gentlemen," exclaimed the actor, with a general appeal to the whole assembly, "I am a dying man. You behold one who deemed himself born for greatness—who even in this dire extremity still dares attest that there burns within him some spark of that immortal fire which men call genius—but for whom the sands of life are so fast running out, that it matters little in what ignominious notoriety his days may have their dismal close."

"Great Heaven!" cried the magistrate, in a rage, "am I seated here to listen to a madman?"

"I beseech you, sir, let the witness tell his story his own way."

pleaded Mr. Oole. "You are about to hear a startling revelation. Come, Mr. Johnson, we will take your genius for granted, but how about this dagger?"

"I cannot touch on that without tearing asunder the bandage that confines a bleeding heart. I will be as brief as I can; but I must touch upon the history of a passion as faithful and as pure as any that the greatest poets of the world have made the subject of their verse."

The magistrate groaned aloud, and flung himself back into his chair.

"Pray, sir, be more concise," said Mr. Oole.

"I waited upon Mrs. Hunter, sir, to communicate to her some trivial arrangement connected with the business of Drury Lane Theatre, and after I had done this, I lingered to upbraid her with the coldness and indifference with which she requited such a devotion as is rarely laid at the feet of woman. I accused her of a preference for Mr. Ainsleigh, which she immediately admitted, and, stung by this new proof of her coquetry, I reminded her that she had also given a tacit encouragement to the notorious pursuit of Sir Everard Lestrangle. On this she flew in a passion, asked me how I dared insult her in her own house, and left the room, telling me in the most cutting manner that as she could not order me out of her apartment, she could at least protect herself from my insolence by leaving me. Oh! sir,"—this in an appeal to the incensed magistrate, who was beating the devil's tattoo on the arm of his chair,—“you, whose vast experience has, doubtless, taught you to comprehend the most subtle workings of the human heart,—you, sir, must know how strange a passion love is. No sooner was the divine creature gone than I gave way to a flood of tears in my sorrow at having offended her. ‘Merciful Powers!’ I exclaimed, ‘why do I keep this worthless life, which enables me to succeed in nothing but in making her hate me. If I were dead, she would, perchance, drop a tear of pity on my grave.’ I gave a distracted glance round the room, calculating the distance between the windows and the street below, and for the moment fully intending to destroy myself by springing from one of them. That glance, hurried as it was, showed me yonder dagger lying amidst a litter of silk and ribbon on a table near one of the windows. Scarce had my eyes perceived it when I darted upon it as a tiger on his quarry, and hid it in my breast. ‘This will serve,’ I said to myself, ‘for a death that shall be at once more dignified and less public.’”

"In plain English," said Mr. Oole, "you stole the dagger."

"So far I admit myself a thief, sir," replied the actor, with ineffable dignity. "I took the dagger."

"And did not kill yourself with it?"

"No, sir. I killed Sir Everard Lestrangle."



I started as if I had been shot, so intense was the surprise evoked by this brief sentence. There was a general movement in the court, and I saw my father wave his hat at me across the intervening crowd, as much as to say, "You are saved."

The magistrate took the matter in a very different humour. He gave a second groan, louder than the first.

"If you think, sir," he cried, "to benefit the prisoner by bringing forward a madman to take this murder upon his shoulders, you will find your mistake by-and-by. Such tomfoolery as this can only injure your client."

"I beg your pardon, sir. If you will be patient, I shall be able to support Mr. Johnson's statement by independent testimony. In the meantime, I entreat you to hear him to the end, and with some indulgence. He has come here in a very noble spirit, prepared to encounter the worst results of his candour, in order to save an innocent fellow-creature."

"'Tis a case of Damon and Pythias in a criminal court, sir, I protest," cried the magistrate, contemptuously.

"Nay, sir, so far from being friends, you hear that my client and Mr. Johnson were rivals," remonstrated Mr. Oole, and then went on with his interrogation. "Now, Mr. Johnson, will you be kind enough to tell us what you did with that dagger?"

"I carried it in my breast for four days," replied the actor, "intending to play the Roman's part, and die as Brutus died. But I had my worldly affairs to arrange, and the few remaining years of a bedridden parent to provide for. I had a little to leave behind me, and for the rest, I trusted to the generosity of one who had ever been kind to the needy. I allude to Mrs. Hunter. This duty performed, my road to dusky death was clear. In this manner the week wore on till Friday evening—and I still lived. On that evening I saw Sir Everard and his friend the Major behind the scenes of Drury Lane Theatre. I had very little to do in the piece performed that night, and some leisure in which to observe them. I hung about near them, unnoticed, and contrived to overhear some of their conversation. There was a wager to be decided between them that night—a wager in which Mrs. Hunter was concerned. An appointment was made for a supper in Surry Street at one o'clock. 'At which hour I will introduce you to a lady who has been my mistress for the last seven years, but whose prudery has forbidden her to avow it,' said Sir Everard. Consider, gentlemen, if this was not enough to kindle infernal fires in the breast of one who had long worshipped this lady with an almost religious homage. I had revered her, gentlemen, as profoundly as I adored her. Conceive my feelings, then, at hearing her spoken of thus. For the rest of that night I was indeed a madman. Everything was against me. Little as I had to do, I was engaged to the very end of the performance, and it was after mid-

night before I could leave the theatre. I went straight to Surry Street. There were lights in Mrs. Hunter's windows, but all was dark below stairs. I stood on the opposite side of the street and waited—waited with this wretched brain on fire. It was not long. As the clock of St. Mary's church struck one, I heard the door opened quickly, and Sir Everard Lestrangle came out. Gentlemen, if it were to do again, I would do it."

He looked round the court as he said this, at the top of his voice, with a conviction that was almost heroic. There was not so much as a murmur or movement in all that assembly.

"I drew my dagger. I know not how long my hand had been clutching the hilt, but I know it was in my grasp when the door opened. I darted across the road, and came upon him, a little behind. Oh, gentlemen, as I stand here, it was by no deliberate cowardice, I stabbed him in the back. I would as lief have met him face to face—as lief have exchanged shots with him across a pocket-handkerchief,—but I meant to kill him."

"That will do, sir," cried the magistrate; "it is against all precedent that you should stand there to criminate yourself in this manner."

He gave an order to one of his myrmidons, and Mr. Johnson was removed from the witness-box, but detained in custody in another part of the court. The next witness called was a certain James Waddy, waiter at the "Bull-and-Mouth," Fleet Street.

"Were you in Surry Street on the night of Sir Everard Lestrangle's death?" Mr. Oole asked, after this witness had been duly sworn.

"I was."

"What happened while you were there?"

"My master sent me and another man with the supper that Sir Everard had ordered for one o'clock. It was a hot supper, and we brought it in covered dishes on two trays——"

"The supper is not to the point, sir," growled the magistrate.

"We came down Hay's Court, you see, sir, which was the shortest way," continued the witness, somewhat disconcerted, "and it was striking one as we turned out of the Strand. 'We're after time, Jim,' William Dwyer, the other waiter, says to me, for you see, sir, Sir Everard Lestrangle had laid it down as the supper was to be to the moment——"

"You are rambling, sir," interjected the magistrate, in a stentorian voice.

"I beg your worship's pardon, but I was coming to the point. Turning sharp round the corner, with my tray upon my head, which is always tipuppy like, yer honour, what should I do but come full tilt against a fellow running for his life, as pale as a ghost."

"How do you know that he was pale, sir?" demanded the magistrate. "We have been told that the night was dark. Indeed, the almanack tells us as much. There was no moon!"

"Begging your worship's pardon, but there's a lamp at the corner of Hay's Court, and I saw his face as plain as I can see yours."

"Well, sir, and his face was the same face as the prisoner's yonder, was it not?—a little paler no doubt, for he has summoned up all his impudence to brazen out to-day's business, but the very same face, I'll be sworn."

"Begging your worship's pardon, no, my lord. The prisoner is not the man. We went bang up against each other, and I nearly lost my equilibrium, and felt my tray upon the slip, but I balanced it somehow. The man's face was within a foot of mine when he bounced again me; and I never saw such a white, scared-looking wretch as he was."

"Eh, you protest the prisoner is not the man? Remember, you are on your oath, sir, and prevarication here is rank perjury. Now, have you ever seen the man since that night?"

"Yes, your worship. I saw him at the door of the court just now, a sick gentleman, that was brought here in a chair."

This witness was examined and cross-examined, but his evidence, so far as it went, was not to be shaken. This interrogation closed the day's proceedings, and I was again remanded. I found my father at the door of the court. He clasped me in his arms with irrepressible rapture.

"My boy, thou art saved!" he exclaimed in a choking voice. "Oh, Robert! thou canst never know what infernal agonies I have suffered in the week that is just over."

I grasped his hand in silence. Had my life depended upon the effort, I could not have spoken a word. We got into a coach together, my jailors still in close attendance upon me, for my captivity was not yet over. We had driven to the prison before I was calm enough to ask any questions. As soon as my father and I were alone in my room, I began to interrogate him.

"How, in the name of Heaven, came that unhappy wretch to acknowledge his crime?" I exclaimed.

"'Tis a wonderful story, Robert," replied my father, "and you shall hear it only from the lips of the heroine."

"The heroine!"

"Yes, child; and as great a heroine, to my mind, as any of your mythical or historical damsels—your Unas or Joans. 'Twas Margery who saved you, Robert; Margery who brought that fellow to denounce himself; Margery who first hit upon the right scent; who hunted out the evidence against this man Johnson, and so worked upon his poor weak soul as to bring him where you saw him to-day. No one else could have done what she has done. Upon my honour, Robert, you owe her the devotion of a lifetime!"

"And I will pay the debt, sir," I answered, solemnly.

Yet in that moment, for the first time since the light had

broken upon my situation, my spirits sank to zero. My first definite thought, after I had recovered the first shock of Johnson's revelation, had been the thought that Dora Lestrangle would discover that I was not a villain. To be scorned by her was a shame tenfold more dreadful than the contumely of all the rest of mankind. To stand exonerated before her was a relief that raised my soul to the seventh heaven.

But she was nothing to me; and all the warmest feelings of my heart were due to the woman who had succoured me in my illness and saved me in my peril. I was not altogether a renegade to that generous and faithful soul. At the cost of a more bitter pang than any words can describe, I thrust Dora's dear image from my heart, and turned all my thoughts to that future which was to be shared with Margery.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### I COME INTO MY ESTATE.

MY father left me soon after my return to the prison, in order to go back to the court to ascertain what had been done with Mr. Johnson; and he had scarcely departed when Margery appeared. She was as pale as on the day when she first visited me in this dismal place, but there was an almost seraphic joy in her countenance.

"I have saved thee, Robert!" she exclaimed, as I took her in my arms and pressed my lips upon her pale forehead. Her face and hands were cold as ice, and I made her sit down close to the fire before I would hear another word.

"Yes, dear girl," I replied, "you have saved this worthless life for the second time, and henceforth its owner is your slave!"

"Oh, Robert!" she said, with a mournful shake of her head, "I do not want a slave."

"Your lover, then—your husband! Your fond and faithful servant until death!"

"Dear Robert"—still with the same grave and almost mournful manner, which contrasted strangely with that look of joy she had worn when she entered my room,—“dear friend! you are too grateful. If Heaven had not inspired me, I could have done nothing. God has been good to me, Robert. When I left you, after my first visit here, it was with an aching heart. I knew not which way to turn. I racked my wretched brain, but all was blank. I could imagine no solution to the mystery of that bad man's death. Then came the thought of that dagger. I called Hannah, and questioned her closely about the table where you told me you left that fatal weapon. Had she touched it to dust or tidy it at all last week? Yes, she told me; she had arranged my work on Tuesday morning—the Tuesday morning before the murder—and she would take her oath there was no

such thing as a dagger on the table. She is a truthful creature, and would not, I felt sure, deceive me. This set me thinking who could have taken the dagger, which must have been removed on Monday, if your impression that you had left it on my work-table was to be relied on. I had had but two visitors on that day—one of my fellow-actresses, who came to take a dish of tea with me, and Mr. Johnson, who brought me notice of the night's performance. My mind fixed immediately on this last. He had been shamefully violent in his conversation with me, and had repeated a threat which I had too often heard from his lips, and which was no less than that he would assuredly be driven to destroy himself if I persisted in rejecting his suit. I quitted him in anger, and went into the next room, whence I could hear him muttering to himself as he stalked up and down my parlour. It was full ten minutes before he went away. Upon reviewing his conduct on this occasion, I felt convinced that 'twas he who had stolen the dagger; and it was not long before my suspicions went further, and pointed to him as the murderer of Everard Lestrangle."

"Strange!" I exclaimed, "strange that I should never have thought of him in connection with that crime."

"You do not know the wretched, half-demented creature as well as I do. My suspicions once aroused, I watched him closely every night at the theatre, and soon perceived that he was suffering from a suppressed agitation which made it difficult for him to get through the smallest scene, or attend to the routine of his business behind the scenes. He was strangely absent, much paler than usual, and started when spoken to. Other people observed the change in him, but only remarked that mad Johnson was a trifle madder than usual. I took occasion to test him by telling him of your danger, and ventured some conjectures as to the real assassin, and I saw that every word I spoke went home. But he put on a dogged air, and told me that Sir Everard Lestrangle deserved to die, and that it was a good thing there was one of my lovers got rid of. 'I am a woman who can exist without a lover, sir,' I said to him, 'but I cannot endure that an innocent man should perish. If you can throw any light upon this business, for pity's sake speak, and save a guiltless fellow-creature.' 'What should I know of it?' he cried angrily, but with a countenance like death. This kind of conversation was repeated between us several times, with variations. I could perceive that the unhappy wretch became hourly more distracted. On Saturday last, when I knew he was engaged at a rehearsal, I went to the house where his bedridden mother lodges, and contrived to see the old woman who waits upon her. I will not trouble you with a minute account of our conversation, but from her I heard enough to confirm my suspicions. Before this I had communicated my ideas to Mr. Oole, who

waited upon me daily. It was he who thought of questioning the tavern waiter, when he heard that the supper was brought to the door almost immediately after the murder. To be brief, Robert, I believe that my reproaches, and his own tormented conscience, so worked upon that poor creature Johnson, that he could at last no longer support his existence. He bought a pennyworth of arsenic, and swallowed it last night, and about an hour after, believing himself dying, had himself put in a chair, and brought to my house long after midnight, to ease his mind by acknowledging his guilt to me. The dose, however, was not strong enough to be fatal. Hannah Surfet and I plied him with antidotes all night long. I took down his confession from his own lips, and made him sign it, with Hannah and myself for witnesses to the signature, lest he should die before he could exonerate you. He was very weak, poor unhappy creature, and declared that if he lived to see the morning's light he would willingly give himself up to justice. 'I would rather be hanged half a dozen times than endure the anguish I have suffered within the last week,' he said. Oh, Robert, I hope he may not live to be hanged!" cried Margery.

"We must intercede for him, dearest," I answered. "There is little doubt he was demented when he did the deed. The magistrate called him a madman to-day. I do not think it would be impossible for us to get him off as a lunatic."

She sighed, and sat downcast, looking into the fire.

"What a miserable woman I am, Robert, to be the cause of so much mischief!"

"Nay, my dear, there was a fatality in this, and I cannot but consider Mr. Johnson the instrument of Divine vengeance."

She was not easily to be comforted, and in the hope of distracting her from these gloomy thoughts, I began to speak of our future, and of the change that had come to my fortunes since my journey to Hauteville.

"It was not worth while talking of Lady Barbara's will while I was under suspicion of a felony, which would have confiscated my inheritance," I said, "but now that I am in a fair way to regaining my liberty, we may speak of it. If that will can be established, we shall be rich, Margery."

"We shall be rich," she repeated slowly, with a thoughtful air, "you and I; but Lady Lestrangle will be reduced to poverty."

The sudden mention of that name moved me, in spite of my philosophy.

"Nay, my dear," I said, "we have no reason to suppose that the loss of the Hauteville estate will make Lady Lestrangle a beggar. She has her own fortune."

"She had her own fortune, which in all probability Sir Everard has spent, to the last sixpence. I have heard as much."

"In that case it will be in our power to prevent her suffering."

any inconvenience from the loss of Lady Barbara's estate. I can settle an income upon her—so arranging it that she shall believe it was bequeathed to her by Lady Barbara—and we can give her the free use of Hauteville House while we are in India."

She was silent, still contemplating the fire, with a pensive countenance; nor could I succeed in banishing that sadness which had come upon her after the first burst of pleasure with which she greeted me.

The next day saw me a free man, after I had gone through certain formalities which I need not linger to describe. I was free, and went back to my chambers in Brick Court, where my father and I hobbled and nobbed in very much the same free and easy fashion that had obtained years ago between Mr. Hay and myself.

We both dined with Mr. Swinfen on the night after my release, and he informed me that he had not the slightest apprehension of opposition from Lady Lestrangle or her representatives on the question of my rights under Lady Barbara's will.

"As for Lady Lestrangle herself," he said, on which my foolish heart must needs begin to beat furiously, "nothing could be more noble than her conduct. She protested she had always believed Lady Barbara would leave you handsomely provided for, and she was therefore in no way astonished by the discovery of the will. In a word, she is a very high-minded woman, and you have no difficulty to fear from her. Her lawyers were inclined to cavil, but on our second interview they informed me that their client forbade any attempt to dispute the will. "'Generous,' said Mr. Theobald, the senior partner of the firm, 'but foolish! A document produced in such a manner should have been disputed tooth and nail.'"

"You saw Lady Lestrangle while I was in prison," I exclaimed eagerly. "Did she believe me to be her husband's assassin?"

"She did not," replied Mr. Swinfen, decisively. "On the contrary, she took the trouble to inform me of her belief in your innocence. 'But I have put the case into the hands of others,' Mr. Swinfen," she said, "and I cannot help what they do." She was much distressed, poor soul, and I had to assure her that we should get you out of trouble shortly."

To know that Dora had never thought me guilty was an unspeakable relief. I called upon Mr. Swinfen alone next morning at his chambers, to take counsel with him upon the alteration in Lady Lestrangle's circumstances which would be brought about by the discovery of the will.

"I am told that Lestrangle squandered every penny of her private fortune," I said; "and as he had very little to get from his father, Sir Marcus, I apprehend that the loss of the Hauteville estate will leave her almost a beggar."

Mr. Swinfen shrugged his shoulders, and took a turn up and down the room before he answered me.

"I have very little doubt that the gentleman got rid of his wife's fifty thousand pounds before he came into the Hauteville estate," he said presently, "for I know he was in the hands of the Jews when his father died. Nor had Sir Marcus anything of his own to leave, except the lease and furniture of the house in St. James's Square."

"But suppose this will had not been discovered, and Lady Lestrangle had inherited Hauteville from her husband, pray what would her pecuniary position have been?"

"She would have had what you will have—perhaps an income of four to five thousand a year."

"She must have at least half the income, whatever it is," I said, after a few minutes' thought. "I am going back to India, where I can live upon my pay, and have actually no need for any of this money. All I shall care to spend will be for the improvement and restoration of the dear old place, which has acquired an aspect of utter decay and desolation in the hands of Sir Everard Lestrangle. You must contrive to make Lady Lestrangle believe that Lady Barbara left her an income chargeable on the estate."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Swinfen. "She has been furnished with a copy of the will."

"Could you not invent a codicil—which may fairly have been discovered since the finding of the will?"

"I am not fond of inventions," said Mr. Swinfen; "nor do I think Lady Lestrangle is a woman to be easily duped by such a contrivance as you suggest. It is a pity," he added, looking at me with a meditative air, "that the business cannot be managed another way."

I was quick to guess what he meant, and felt myself changing colour as he looked at me.

"There is no other way that I can propose," I said gravely. "As for Hauteville, it would be most entirely at the lady's service, were she inclined to occupy it. It is very unlikely that I shall be able to live there for the next ten years. I am going back to India almost immediately after my marriage."

"Your marriage! What, are you positively going to be married, Mr. Ainsleigh?"

"Yes. Mrs. Hunter is shortly to become my wife."

"The actress of Drury Lane!" exclaimed Mr. Swinfen, with an air of wonder that stung me; and yet I knew him to be ignorant of Margery's antecedents.

"Yes, Mr. Swinfen," I replied, "the actress of Drury Lane—the noble woman whose sense and courage have saved me from the gallows!"

"Well, I can scarcely wonder that you should be eager to give her so strong a proof of your gratitude. There is a certain prejudice against such a marriage; but this lady is beautiful, a



genius, and of unsullied character, I am told, despite the pursuit of Sir Everard. I daresay you might do worse, Mr. Ainsleigh; yet I am free to confess it is not the union I——"

"Oh, sir," I exclaimed, "there are not many of us so happy as to gratify our first choice."

I urged him once more to manage the matter of the codicil for me, assuring him that I myself was in no need of the income arising from the Hauteville estate, and so left him.

Three<sup>or</sup> four days after this interview I received a letter from Lady Lestrangle's solicitors, informing me that their client had surrendered all ownership in Hauteville House, and all lands thereunto belonging, and that I could assume possession of the same at my pleasure. The next country post brought me a communication from Mrs. Grimshaw, to the following effect:—

"HAUTEVILLE HOUSE,

"Sir,

"10th November, 1757.

"As I am apprised that you are become (by a strange caprice of Fortune, which does not always bestow her favours on the most deserving) the owner and master of this house, I beg to tender my resignation of a post which I have now occupied with, I venture to affirm, some credit to myself and much profit to my employers, for five-and-twenty years, since neither the promptings of interest—to which, I thank God, I have ever been proudly indifferent—nor the affection for a familiar place which springs from the habit of long years, could reconcile me to a situation in the household of one whom I regret to be unable either to esteem or respect. This mansion, which has of late years been maintained in a somewhat pinched and poverty-stricken manner, will henceforward, I opine, be suffered to lapse into complete decay, as I cannot conceive that your habits or inclinations would dispose you to occupy so respectable a home.

"I leave my keys in the custody of your friend and ally, Mrs. Betty, to whose sole charge I commit a mansion which once maintained forty servants, and which in its present degradation and decay inspires the mind with pity, almost as profound as that which moved the Prophet Jeremiah for the fenced city that had become an heap.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your Servant,

"MARTHA GRIMSHAW."

And here I may fairly take my leave of Mrs. Grimshaw, who retired to a respectable lodging in the High Street of Warborough, so close to Brewer's Yard that her ears might be gratified by the melodious voices of Mr. Noggers's congregation hawling their hymns as she sat by her own hearth; and here she for thirty years in the odour of sanctity, her black pocket and dismal visage a favourite subject of ridicule for the

children of the town. The time came when my own rascals learned to caricature this venerable dame in the margins and fly-leaves of their lesson-books. The closing years of a respectable and rancorous existence were tormented by a deadly quarrel, arising out of I know not what, with Mr. Noggers's successor; and at the tag-end of her life Mrs. Grimshaw deserted the followers of Wesley and returned to the fold of the Established Church. When I think of her sour womanhood and her desolate old age, I can but wonder at frail foolish humanity, which can be so constant in hate, and take so much trouble to do harm.

There was now nothing to hinder my union with Margery except our mutual concern for that unhappy sinner, Johnson, who languished in gaol, sick almost to death, awaiting his trial. I had pleaded this poor creature's cause very warmly with Mr. Swinfen, and that gentleman, whose heart was ever ready to compassionate the distressed, had entered upon the subject with unusual earnestness. The prisoner was examined by several physicians, the majority of whom pronounced him quite sane enough to be responsible for his actions, but of a temperament so excitable as to touch very near upon the confines of madness. One learned gentleman happily declared him a confirmed lunatic, and on this evidence, and a petition to His Majesty, we relied for saving the unfortunate creature's life.

Margery and I visited him constantly while he lay in prison, awaiting his trial.

The arsenic he had swallowed before he gave himself up to justice had been quite enough to make him seriously ill, and he was now confined to his bed, and attended daily by the gaol surgeon. We carried him such small luxuries as his condition required, and did our best to sustain his spirits. He was meekness itself, but not so much cast down as one might have expected to find him under such circumstances. He spoke with a most heroic calmness of the prospect of being hung; and I do verily believe that he rather hankered for the gallows, as a notorious and even famous manner of ending his days.

"The world will remember me as one who, like Othello, loved not wisely, but too well," he said with a satisfied air.

His feeble condition, which in no manner improved as the days wore on, inspired me with the hope that death might mercifully intervene to save him from the hangman, or from that alternative doom which reflection had taught me to consider something worse than the scaffold. Should the physician's evidence be strong enough to convince a jury of the prisoner's lunacy, what would be his fate? To be immured for life in a pauper madhouse, at the mercy of gaolers more brutal than any within the walls of Newgate or Bridewell. Better the darkest end that could come to a man's life, than existence indefinitely prolonged under such conditions as these.

There were times when I thought that Johnson could not live till the day appointed for his trial; but he did survive, and sat in the dock, the veriest spectre, I imagine, that ever appeared in a place where so many ghastly countenances have been seen. His trial was brief. Judge and jury rejected the notion of his madness, without a moment's hesitation.

"He had sufficient wit to earn his bread by the trade of a stage-player for the last ten years of his life—an occupation requiring peculiar gifts of memory and quickness of apprehension—and all we are told of his character by those who knew him in the exercise of this vocation is, that he was somewhat singular in his manners, and extravagant in his conversation. Why, gentlemen, if every scoundrel who committed a crime of this kind were to be let off as a madman on the score of some eccentricity in his habits or his speech, our madhouses would be stuffed with such murderous vermin, and the hangman might find his calling a sinecure. The prisoner was sane enough to steal the dagger, and to carry it about him for three days in secret. He was sane enough to lie in wait for his victim, and to attack him in a safe and cowardly fashion from the rear. What, gentlemen, are our legislators to be struck down thus, in the streets of London, by every jealous fool who chooses to harbour a grudge against his superiors, and the villain to go scatheless because there is some fantastical doctor willing to pronounce him a lunatic?"

This was the gist of the speech made by the counsel for the prosecution. The counsel for the defence had no right of reply, and the judge, in his charge to the jury, bore heavily upon the ghastly wretch who sat shivering in the dock. The jury were absent only ten minutes, and the verdict was that which I had but too surely forecast.

We spent that night with the doomed sinner in his cell, and had the satisfaction of seeing much spiritual comfort administered to him by the chaplain of the gaol—a kindly soul, whom that horrid scene had not hardened. He was very ill, and when I left him in company with the surgeon, that gentleman informed me he had but a few days' life in him.

"'Twere a pity he should hold out till Monday," he said thoughtfully. "He is in a very bad way; his constitution could never have been good for much, even at its best, and has been undermined, I fancy, by hard work and harder living. That arsenic very nearly did his business; indeed, the effects of the poison are still hanging about him, and, taken in conjunction with the state of his mind, has brought him to the condition in which you see him."

"God grant him a blessed release," I exclaimed, "between this and Monday!"

My prayer was heard: Mr. Johnson expired on Saturday night, Margery and I being with him in his final moments. He was

conscious to the end, and committed his desolate and afflicted mother to our care.

"She is a very old woman," he said, in a tone that might have melted the sternest, "and can hardly trouble you long. I commend her to your charity, Margery."

It was the first time I had ever heard him address her by her Christian name.

He repeated it with a smile upon his face, and died before the smile had vanished.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### I REGAIN MY LIBERTY.

THERE now remained no impediment to my union with Margery, and I was desirous that the ceremony should be performed without delay. We were already in December, and to keep within the bounds of my leave of absence, I must certainly sail in January; and in delaying so long as this I ventured to make sure of a seven months' passage, on my return to Bengal as well as on my homeward voyage—a second stroke of good luck which might not befall me; indeed, sailing, as I must do, in the dead of the winter, the chances were strongly against me.

I explained this to Margery, and urged upon her the necessity of despatch. I begged her to write to her father, asking him to bring his wife to London at once, to witness their daughter's wedding.

"We will be married on Christmas Eve, Madge, if you like," I said; "it is a holy day, and the ceremony that is to bind us for life will seem all the more solemn on such a vigil."

"The ceremony that binds us for life, Robert," she repeated with singular gravity; "have you considered what that means?"

"Yes, dearest, as completely as I have considered the value of the prize I am to gain by that ceremony."

"The prize!" she cried, bursting into tears. "Oh! Robert, have you forgotten the night you spurned me from you in the house by the Fleet Prison?"

"For God's sake, do not remind me of that!" I exclaimed, stung to the quick by the allusion.

"If we were man and wife, Robert, do you think it would never come back to your mind? It would, and you would hate me."

"Margery," I said earnestly, "let all the circumstances of that horrid night be blotted from your memory, as they have long been from mine. Sure, my love, from the hour when, as children, more innocent than the birds in the woodland, we talked of mating, Fate must have designed that you and I should be united; for see how strangely our destiny has brought us together at the end!"

"Ah, Robert! but if it were not for thy happiness we should come together; if——"

"Nay, Margery," said I, "there is but one subject you ever speak of that can make me angry, and you have hit upon that to-night."

"I will say no more, but oh! Robert, there are doubts that gnaw the heart."

I was silent. Disputes of this kind were beyond measure galling; but Margery left me no leisure to chew the cud of my vexation. She had taken up her guitar next minute, and was singing me Rosalind's ditty with her full fresh voice; and after that she told me a story of Garrick, mimicking the bashaw of Drury Lane to the life.

I made all necessary arrangements for our wedding on Christmas Eve. We were to be married at Margery's lodgings, in the evening; and Captain Briggs, who was home again, and full of concern for all I had suffered during his absence, was to be my best man.

"I must needs be uncommonly fond of you, Bob," he said, "to accept such an office, for it is like signing my own death-warrant. Sure, I would give twenty years of my life, were the sum of my future existence but five-and-twenty, to stand in your shoes on Christmas Eve."

It was in vain that I urged my wishes with reference to Lady Barbara's will upon Mr. Swinfen. He absolutely refused to have any hand in the fabrication of a codicil, and protested against so great a folly as the endeavour to impose upon Lady Lestrangle's good sense by so shallow a fiction. Without his aid I felt powerless to act, since Dora knew him to be concerned in my interests, and would hardly be inclined to accept any document as genuine that should be unsupported by him. I was therefore reduced to the miserable necessity of knowing her impoverished by my good fortune, and must either remain inactive, or run the risk of revealing myself as her would-be benefactor. This hazard I could not bear to encounter. To my mind, she appeared so lofty and divine a creature, that I shrank with horror from the notion of bringing her down to the vulgar level of a pecuniary transaction.

"I wonder that you give yourself so much concern upon this matter," Mr. Swinfen said rather impatiently, when I had been vainly endeavouring to alter his resolution, "and I think you pay a very ill compliment to Mrs. Hunter, your wife that is to be, by this eagerness to make away with your fortune for the benefit of another lady. Sir Everard Lestrangle's widow has friends of her own family, and they no doubt will be quite as ready as yourself to come to the rescue. She has already left St. James's Square, and has taken up her abode at Highgate, with her aunt, a Mrs. Joshua Hemsley, the widow of a wealthy merchant. No doubt she can have a home there for life, if she pleases. But I daresay she'll marry again before next midsummer."

I left Mr. Swinfen's office in much trouble of mind, and having no better occupation for that evening, which was the penultimate night of Mrs. Hunter's dramatic career—she was to take her farewell of the public on the next—I walked out to Highgate by way of calming my spirits, and took the trouble to inquire for Mrs. Hemsley's house, at an inn, where I refreshed myself with a glass of white wine. The tapster directed me to a row of handsome houses on the brow of the hill, the first of which, on the London side, was Mrs. Hemsley's. It was a square red brick mansion, large and imposing, with a fine lantern in the roof—a house which I afterwards ascertained had been built by a son-in-law of Oliver Cromwell.

On this moonlit December night there was no sign of human life to be seen upon the stately façade of the mansion—no lighted window—no open door with a trim maid or a pompous footman peering from it. All was dark and silent. I paced the road for about an hour, thinking of her who dwelt within that sombre habitation, speculating—alas! how idly—on what her life might be in the days to come, when I was on the distant shore of the Indian Ocean. St. Paul's sonorous chimes sounded the hour of ten before I turned my back upon the house and walked down the hill towards the city.

I was too much out of tune to see Margery that evening, though I had half promised to sup with her after the play, so I wandered on without thinking where I was going, until I strayed so far eastward as to lose myself in a labyrinthine neighbourhood close to the docks—that strange semi-marine world which appears to have no characteristic in common with the rest of the City. The tall spars, which rose like a forest of timber against a sky of deepest indigo, under the full round moon, seemed verily to have brought with them the odour and breath of the sea. Here I wandered till late in the night, doing battle with my rebellious soul; and having succeeded at last in thoroughly wearing out mind and body, I went back to my chambers, somewhat calmer and less depressed than when I left them.

The next night was Margery's triumph; and rarely, I conceive, has so intoxicating an ovation rewarded the labours of genius as that with which the public greeted Mrs. Hunter at the close of this farewell performance, when the curtain having fallen on *Romeo and Juliet*, she came forward, and with a most touching air of humility and gratitude, delivered a brief valedictory address which Mr. Garrick had been so obliging as to compose for her. The theatre rang with a universal thunder of applause; and I was especially glad of this enthusiasm on the part of the public, as Jack Hawker and his wife, who had come to London that day, were among the audience. These simple creatures were seated with me in a side-box which I had hired for the occasion, and never did I see so genuine a rapture as

that with which my foster-father shared the triumph of his child. The poor mother sat in silence throughout the play, weeping copiously in a corner of the box when the lovers' troubles thickened; but Jack never left his seat in the front, whence he surveyed the stage and audience with a radiant countenance. And he afterwards informed me that it was with some difficulty he restrained himself from crying out, "Beant she a beautiful creetur! and she be my darter, ladies and gentlemen,"—an address which I think would have produced an original effect upon that fashionable assembly. His indignation against Capulet knew no bounds; and he also told me, in the same confidence, that he had much ado to refrain from pitching his stick at that "hoary old villain."

"Why, Robin," he exclaimed, "I never knowed that play-actin' wur like this here, and that I should see my darter in a house that's as fine as the King's palace, with all these fine folks goin' mad about her. There beant a prouder father in London than John Hawker this night. God bless her! Robin; she's the beautifullest creetur that ever walked upon this earth; and to think that we've been parted all these years!"

We were all to sup together in Snrri Street, and never can I forget the joyful tenderness with which the father embraced his child when we all met in Margery's parlour.

"I forgive thee everything, thou dear vagabond," cried Jack, "for the sake of to-night. Eh, but thou hast made thy old father proud. To see the ladies and gentlemen clapping and waving their pocket-handkerchiefs like mad; and yet so quiet, you might have thought 'em all turned into stone, when you and the young gentleman was in trouble. But, Lord save us! how pale thou art, child; art sure thee didst not swallow any of the p'ison?"

"Dear father," cried Madge, laughing, "it was an empty bottle."

"Lord save us! Well, I thought they'd have real p'ison, and that you'd only make-believe to drink it."

"It was all make-believe, dear father. But I am so glad you and my mother were pleased."

"'Twas downright melting, Margery," said the mother; "and 'twas so life-like, that when the young gentleman dragged thee out of the tomb, I thought thou wert dead in real earnest, and I should never hear thy sweet voice again. I was all of a tremble till you came in front of that green blind and spoke to the people. I should never like to see thee do that again—it was too real."

"You are not likely to see it again, dear mother. I have rotten those boards for the last time."

She ended this speech with a faint sigh, expressive of a regret which, I doubt not, is natural to all who have once tasted the fire-water of public applause, on setting aside the intoxicating up for ever.

But whatever sadness this thought might have caused seemed transient, and until the close of that meeting, Margery was at her brightest—full of playful tenderness for her parents, and of consideration for me. If I could have found fault with her for any reason, it would have been that her gaiety was somewhat wilder than I should have cared to have seen it, and that in the abandonment of her mirth there was something of that recklessness which prejudice has been so apt to charge upon her profession. But a man must have had the saturnine humour of my Lord Chesterfield—who, in his recently published letters to his son, thanks God that he has never laughed since he attained years of discretion—to disapprove of manners that were so full of fascination, and conversation that brimmed over with fun and animal spirits. I left her with Mr. and Mrs. Hawker, at two o'clock in the morning, more than ever impressed by her beauty and vivacity.

"Were a man but heart-whole when he first looked upon her, how madly he might love her!" I thought; and then I asked myself whether that kind of mad love was half so enduring a passion as the more serious affection, born of gratitude and esteem, which I felt for her. There now wanted but three days to our marriage, and it had been arranged between Margery and myself that I should spend the intervening time in a brief visit to Hauteville, in order that I might inspect the estate of which I was master, and make all necessary arrangements for the proper preservation of the old place during my absence in India. The dear girl would fain have had me travel post, in a chariot and six, in honour of my altered position, but I preferred to take my chance in the coach which had carried me before.

I found Mrs. Grimshaw and her confidential maid departed, and Mrs. Betty in sole possession of the rambling old mansion. She took me through all the rooms, and pointed out so many dilapidations—crumbling ceilings, split panels, loose banisters on the great oak staircase, broken flags in the marble-paved hall, windows that would not open, and doors that would not shut, and so many leakages in the roof, which feature of the building appeared to be an ingenious architectural device for the concentration of rain-water in particular spots, that I began to think my inheritance of Hauteville House was something like that gift of a white elephant which Oriental tyrants are said to bestow upon a subject whom they desire to ruin. It would have needed some thousands to put the place in good order, according to Mrs. Betty, who made the most of all defects. No words can paint the desolation of the rooms, the dismal mouldiness that brooded over their faded splendour, the haunted air which made me fancy a lurking figure behind every half-open door, the mysterious sounds of unearthly footfalls in the distance which our feet awakened. Yet, in spite of every



melancholy thought—and the place inspired some of the saddest—I had an infinite satisfaction in the sense of freedom with which I explored the familiar mansion, knowing myself its master. There was not a room that I could not people with the dead; not a memory connected with the place that did not awaken my keenest regrets, and yet I fancied that I could be happier here than anywhere else.

"You'll let the house, I suppose, sir?" said Betty; "M<sup>r</sup>s. Grimshaw said as how you would."

"Mrs. Grimshaw was wrong," I replied; "Hauteville has never yet been prostituted to the use of strangers, and I will not be the first to degrade it."

I made my arrangements on the spot. Mrs. Betty was willing to remain; she was used to the place, and liked the place, though it was lonesome, she told me; and she did not mind the rumours of "ghosts and spectres," that were prevalent concerning it. She was also acquainted with a respectable willing man, of the gardener species, and his wife—industrious people, and related to herself in some occult manner by the bonds of second cousinship with her eldest sister's husband, who, she believed, would serve me for small wages, in consideration of a comfortable home and a permanent employment. With two women and a man, and now and then an odd man for the rougher work, the house and gardens may be kept fairly enough, Mrs. Betty informed me; and if I would please to employ a builder from Warborough to make the roof waterproof, I need give myself no further trouble about the place till I returned from India.

This arrangement being completed in a satisfactory manner, I went back to Warborough, to call upon a local solicitor who had received rents for Sir Everard Lestrangle, and knew the exact condition of the estate. With him I went the round of the land, let off in farms of from thirty to three hundred acres. Everywhere I met with new evidences of waste and neglect. Homesteads that had slowly fallen to ruin for lack of necessary expenditure, roofs whose ancient timbers had rotted for want of a crown's worth of lead, or a few hundred tiles. On every hand I encountered supplications for repairs—for the most part involving serious outlay—and I then for the first time experienced that determination to get all they want out of a new landlord—although they have meekly borne long years of neglect from an old one—which I have since discovered to be a universal attribute of the tenant mind.

I went back to London on the twenty-third, and in the early winter dusk found myself again at Temple Bar. There reigned an almost unearthly quiet in the courts and cloisters of the Temple, as I walked through them on my way to the chambers—a quiet that set me thinking of that night, nearly eight years

ago, when I had returned from the theatre to find Philip Hay crouching on my threshold. How strangely are our lives interwoven with the memory of the dead! I had his voice in my ears to-night as I mounted the stair.

Never had my sitting-room looked more dismal and sordid than it did to-night, when I surveyed it by the glimmer of a newly-lighted candle. The shabby furniture, dusty and neglected, for Margery had not been here of late,—the hopeless litter of papers on the faded baize cover of a battered oak desk,—the boots, and canes, and swords, and crumpled ruffles cast pell-mell on one table,—the disordered pile of books upon another: all these things bore witness to the miserable state of a bachelor.

"It will be all changed to-morrow," I said to myself, "and my life will belong to another."

At this moment my eyes were attracted to a letter lying on the table by which I stood—a letter addressed in Margery's hand, and which was bulkier and more important-looking than the little flying billets she had been used to send me—sometimes half a dozen in a day.

I broke the seal with a strange foreboding of I know not what, and began to read a letter that changed the current of my life:—

"DEAREST ROBERT,

"Will you think me the vilest, most capricious of women, when you read what I am now going to write? Will you condemn in a breath, without a pause for mercifuller thoughts that can accompany your first indignation at fancying yourself cheated by an inconstant woman? Nay, dearest, you who are so grave and wise, will surely judge me better. You will believe that I have loved you—that to the end of my existence here, I must still continue to love you—better than I have ever loved myself. When you read this, I shall be far away. Oh, my love! I have no words to describe those agonies of mind which I have suffered in the past few months—agonies of doubt and self-reproach, which have poisoned even the joy of your company! How often have you reproached me for groundless jealousy—for foolish petulance. Those humours sprang from a heart ill at ease with itself. Robert, I *knew* all the while that you were sacrificing your own inclinations to a mistaken sense of gratitude for services so small, that they were scarce worth one kindly pressure of your honest hand—one tender throb of your warm true heart. I knew it, and yet was base enough to let the sacrifice go on; but not without many a struggle with my own selfishness. Dearest, from first to last, I knew that you had never loved me—that there was a dearer and a purer image for ever intervening between you and me; but I fancied that in the days to come, by such devotion as few wives have

given their husbands, I might still be happy enough to win your regard. Then came a shock that crushed all my hopes. Sir Everard Lestrangle's death left *her* free, and I knew that your future existence would be one long regret for the unlucky bond that tied you to me. Had you demanded your release at this time, I should have freely given it: and could I be so selfish as to hold you to a promise which you were too generous to revoke? I knew the course that honour counselled, but could not steel my soul against your goodness. You hurried on the date of our marriage with a too generous impatience; and I, in my low selfishness, had almost allowed you to consummate the sacrifice of all your fondest desires. At this last moment, Robert, Heaven has given me the strength I have sought so long in vain. Yes, dearest, with that support I am strong enough to bid you farewell. You will see me no more till you have become the husband of another,—yet, until death, I shall remain ever your faithful

MARGERY."

This was all: not a word, not a hint, of her destination or the plan of her future life. I could scarcely take this letter in earnest. She was trying me, perhaps, as she had done more than once by speeches that cut me to the heart. I hurried at once to her lodgings, where I was informed that Mrs. Hunter had left town at seven o'clock that morning, in a glass coach-and-four, with her father and mother; but the landlady, who told me this, could give me no information as to where the travellers were bound; she could only express her conjecture that they were going a long journey.

I showed my father Margery's letter on the morning of that day which was to have closed with my marriage.

"Before Heaven, Robert!" he exclaimed, as he read, "this woman is as noble as she is lovely. And were her apprehensions well founded, child? Do you really prefer Lestrangle's widow to this bright creature that half the town is mad about?"

"Do you desire me to tell the truth, sir?"

"Unquestionably."

"I never loved but one woman in my life, and that woman is Dora Lestrangle."

"Then thou art, beyond measure, happy in this release. Ay, Bob, I have passed through the furnace, and know what I say. A marriage founded upon pity or gratitude is a mistake so fatal, that all the wisdom of a man's after-life cannot mend it. There is no worse plight; no deeper ruin can befall him. Thank God, you are out of it!"

He gave a vast sigh of relief, as if he felt a burden lifted off his own shoulders.

Yes, if I chose to accept Margery's letter as an order of release, I was free—free to seek her to whom I pledged my faith

years ago in the lamp-lit Vauxhall Garden. Yet, could I thus coldly discard the fondest and truest of women? Could I fling her off whom I had sworn to cherish?—to whom I owed my life twice over, and that which is dearer than life, my good name? Honour forbade the thought of so vile a treason. I went to all whom I had known or heard of as Mrs. Hunter's acquaintances, and, last of all, applied to Mr. Garrick, who would, I considered, be likely to know something of her affairs. But from none of these could I obtain any satisfaction. The manager showed me a letter which Margery had written to him on the eve of her departure.

"I am about to leave England for some time," she wrote, "finding myself in sore need of a holiday that will afford relief of brain as well as of body, and I know not what countries of Europe I may traverse. I have a fancy for seeing Juliet's tomb at Verona, dear sir, and whether it is really like the canvas cupboard your carpenters set for me at Drury Lane; and I shall, if possible, see Venice, and discover whether such a lady as Belvidera ever lived there. But whether I go first to Italy, or waste six months in Holland, or loiter away the best part of a year at Paris, is at present undecided. You were so offended at my leaving the stage, that you may perhaps be not altogether displeased to learn that I have serious thought of some day returning to my old walk of life, if the fickle public do not in the meantime forget me."

"Forget her!" cried Mr. Garrick, passionately, "we have not had such an actress since Woffington was young."

Verona, Venice, or Holland, or Paris. It was a wide itinerary Yet I determined to follow her. In order to do this, it was necessary for me to obtain an extension of my leave, which I procured, with less difficulty than I had expected, from the gentlemen at the India House.

My father was very angry when I informed him of my resolve, rated me for my Quixotism, and tried his hardest to dissuade me from the pursuit I intended.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you run away from the woman you do love, to follow the woman you don't! Was there ever such a madman?"

I persisted, however, and my father, whose leave of absence was now nearly expired, went with me to Havre, where we parted company, very mournfully on my side, and I believe with some sadness on his.

"I would, sir, that you could leave this alien army?" I said, at parting.

"Nay, Robert; the country I serve has been better to me than the land of my birth. It would be a base desire if I wished to turn my back upon her."

So I left him, and made a somewhat rapid pilgrimage from

Havre to Paris, where I instituted a close inquiry as to the late English arrivals—an inquiry I repeated afterwards in all other places where I halted, and always in vain. Thence through Holland, then on to Italy, with no result as regards Margery, but with some pleasure and consolation to myself. I remained abroad something less than the six months I had begged at the India House, and came back to arrange for my passage to Calcutta early in June.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### I FIND A PEACEFUL HAVEN.

NEVER can I forget that calm summer evening on which I paid my second visit to the old house at Highgate. Never can I forget my sensations as I mounted the hill, and halted for a few moments, breathless, not from fatigue, but from the fluttering of my foolish heart, which was too full to be quiet. The city lay below me, bathed in a soft golden haze. Westward, the sky was a flame, and far up in the still evening sky glimmered a faint crescent moon.

I had seen Mr. Swinfen, and from him had heard that Lady Lestrangle was still residing at Highgate with her aunt, Mrs. Joshua Hemsley. Yet, as I drew near the house, before which I had played sentry that bleak winter's night, six months ago, my mind was full of frivolous apprehensions. Dora might be away from home—or she might be disinclined to receive me. A newer and brighter image might have banished my humble figure from her recollection. The terrors and tortures which afflicted me were the terrors and tortures that are common to uncertain lovers. I need not complete the catalogue.

The little village was as tranquil as if it had been situated at the other end of England. I heard the geese screaming on a patch of green by the high road. Every flutter of the leaves sounded in the summer stillness, and, I think, the throbbing of my own heart would have been audible to any one who had passed close by me at that awful moment, when I pulled an iron handle at the tall gate, which set a clanging bell ringing as loud as for an alarm of fire.

A fat black footman opened the door, and told me that Lady Lestrangle was at home; but, on my asking to see her, said she seldom saw visitors, and he would send for her maid, whereupon he rang a bell in the hall, which was answered by a page, whom the pampered negro, evidently too lazy to budge himself, despatched with my message. I was mean enough to say I desired to see Lady Lestrangle on important business.

The maid appeared presently—a rosy-faced young woman, with a Berkshire accent—and asked my name, which I was constrained to tell her, though I was most anxious to take my dear

love by surprise, and learn my fate from the change in her sweet face when she met me.

"My mistress lives very retired, sir," the girl said, "but I will tell her your name, if you will be so kind as to wait while I go to her."

She ushered me into a spacious panelled drawing-room, with four long windows opening on a garden—a room in which there was a delightful sense of coolness and repose. I went straight to one of the open windows, and, advancing towards me, along a wide grass walk between an avenue of climbing roses, twined on poles, I saw the woman I loved.

She looked pale as a lily in her long trailing black dress, but at sight of me grew paler still, yet came on to meet me with a steady footstep, and gave me her hand with the calmest grace in the world. But in that one blessed moment, when our troubled glances first met, I was assured that she loved me.

Then followed the usual greetings—gracious questionings as to where I had been, and what I had been doing, since that awful time when I had lain like a felon in Newgate. We walked up and down the grassy path between the roses, and talked until the moon—which had been such a pale shadow when I mounted the hill—shone silver bright in a deep blue sky. Yet no word had been spoken of love. Nor did I speak until at the last, when the church clock had struck eleven, and I was fain to apologize for the length of my visit.

"It may be a farewell visit, Dora," I said, in a low voice, as we stood on the threshold of the window, whence I had first seen her, "unless you will have it otherwise. I am going back to India in something less than a month from to-night. I feel that it would be ignoble to turn my back upon so glorious a struggle as that which is still in progress yonder."

"Going back to India?"

"Yes. I owe my friends there a little more of my life, Dora; and if I ever live to return—to return perhaps after two or three years' absence—shall I find myself still remembered—greeted as kindly as I have been to-night? Oh, Dora, you must know the prayer that is trembling on my lips! Will you keep my image in your heart—will you believe that no creature on this earth ever loved you so truly as I?"

"No," she cried, with a little hysterical laugh, "I will not sit at home to remember you, Robert. I have played Penelope long enough. I will go with you."

I clasped her in my arms, and the tears of ecstatic joy which I shed as I pressed her to my heart were not shed alone; for, when I saw her face under the moonlight, the sweet eyes were dim with weeping.

We were married within a week of that date, in that enchanted drawing-room at Highgate, at seven o'clock in the evening, and started off to *Hauteville* afterwards through the summer dusk,

and under the summer stars. It was my darling's fancy that our honeymoon should be spent in that neglected old mansion where first I met her.

We were still upon the first stage of our journey when Dora asked me a question.

"When you were very ill in the Temple, Robert—oh! so near dying—had you any strange fancies?"

"One, dearest, that haunted me all through the time when I was at my worst. I was almost sorry to get better, and find it a delusion."

"And what was that?" she asked shyly.

"I fancied that you were with me—that your gentle hands ministered to me in the long dismal nights—that your sweet face bent over my bed."

She clasped her hands with a cry of joy.

"You *do* remember, then, Robert? Yes, I was with you in that dreadful time. It was I who sent away your wicked old nurses, and brought a woman I could rely upon—an old Hauteville servant—to nurse you. I persuaded your doctor to keep my secret, and when I saw your senses were coming back, dear, I left you. I never thought you would have remembered me."

#### L'ENVOI.

For five years my wife and I shared all the shifts and dangers of military life in a strange country. I was with Clive at the relief of Patna, and fought the Dutch under Colonel Forde. By good fortune I escaped being sent to the Carnatic, where our troops were fighting the French, and where I should have been under the constant apprehension of finding myself in arms against my father, from whom I heard so rarely that I knew not when he might be ordered out to India.

I did not return to England until Clive had restored peace to Bengal, by which time I had two dear children, whose tender age demanded English rearing.

Oh, happy sunsets on the Indian Ocean, when my wife and I sat together to watch the swift approach of the tropical night, with our copper-faced ayah and her nurslings squatting on a mat at our feet! happy days of summer *idlesse*, in which we had nothing to do but talk of home, and plan the calm life before us! Not in my fondest daydream did I ever imagine it sweeter than it is.

I bear my grandfather's title now, and am Colonel Ainsleigh, but have become something more of a country squire than a soldier. Our pastures and cattle prosper; and what with prizes in India and the profits of a well-managed domain at home, I am fast becoming a rich man, and my eldest boy, Roderick, is likely to inherit a fine estate. We have no town-house, but the dear old mansion at Highgate is our home

during the parliamentary session, when I work hardest, having won for myself what my dear wife calls "a name" in the House. I take Dora to the theatres occasionally, and when first I returned from India we used to see Mrs. Hunter, who was still the darling of the town; but she retired from the stage in sober earnest soon afterwards, and now lives in a pretty cottage on Twickenham Common, scarce a quarter of a mile from Kitty Clive's. Here my children visit her every summer, and come home laden with toys and sweetmeats, and enchanted with the beautiful lady.

"Is she so very much more beautiful than I am, Roderick?" my wife asked the boy once, with an arch glance at me.

"Oh, yes, two times as boofitle, mamma!" replied the candid urchin.

"And yet, you see, papa liked me best."

"Oh, but perhaps he had never seen the boofitle lady at Twitnam."

"Or, perhaps, she never gave him any sugar-plums," put in Miss Barbara, aged four.

So my children think the Twickenham cottage a paradise in little, and my wife carries them there sometimes, and spends the day with Mrs. Hunter; but Margery and I have never met since the night we supped together after the play, when I thought her spirits too wild in their reckless gaiety.

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## APPENDIX.

[The following matter, chiefly of an historical and retrospective character, has been transferred from earlier portions of the work.]

### NOTE A.

WHEN I first saw Calcutta, nothing could well be darker than the aspect of affairs in that presidency. John Company held his ground as yet only on sufferance, and by virtue of handsome payments to the Soubahdar, whose rule was at once nearer and stronger than the somewhat shadowy sovereignty of Delhi. Nor was the Soubahdar the only power our Company had to fear. France had in these days an apparently sure footing in Hindostan, while her interests were well cared for and her power audaciously pushed by Joseph Francis Dupleix, the Governor of Pondicherry. It was but five years since the bombardment of Madras by the French Admiral, De la Bourdonnais, ending in the capitulation of that town and the Governor of Pondicherry's infamous violation of the treaty of surrender, whereby the Admiral had pledged himself to restore the settlement on payment of a moderate ransom. This notorious treachery had resulted in triumph to the traitor and disgrace to the honourable man, who strove hard to redeem his word with the English, and who, on his return to France, was flung into the Bastille, and



left to languish there for a period of three years, as an encouragement for future honourable-minded admirals. For here I think we may fairly retort upon M. de Voltaire the jest which he afterwards made about our own unfortunate Admiral Byng; since the iniquitous sentence that deprived Byng of life was no more cruel than the slow torture which murdered De la Bourdonnais, a much greater man.

Dupleix, on the contrary, had succeeded in elevating himself to the giddiest summit of power by a series of intrigues with native princes and native usurpers. He was now Governor of the Mogul dominions on the coast of Coromandel, from the river Kistna to Cape Comorin. He affected an Oriental magnificence, known only to native princes, and displayed amongst his splendid insignia the princely badge of the fish; while his friends boldly affirmed that ere long the Mogul on his throne would tremble at the name of Dupleix. The English beheld these triumphs of a rival nation with an indifference that might proceed from either apathy or despair. They made no attempt to stem a torrent that threatened to overwhelm them, and Major Laurence, the commander of the troops, chose this critical juncture as a fitting time for his return to England.

#### NOTE B.

IN order that the narrative of these adventures may be clear to the reader, it may be well for me to give the following description of the condition of Hindostan and her rulers, as I received it from the lips of my patron, Mr. Holwell:—

“You must accept all that you have heard and read of the Great Mogul and his absolute power as a page of past history that ended with the death of Aurungzebe. When that master-spirit sank in the grave, the soul of Timur expired with him. It is not fifty years since that great man died, at ninety-four years of age; and indeed it seems as if to such unscrupulous and commanding genius there belongs a power that can protect life beyond its natural limit. In that half-century seven emperors have sat on the musnud of Delhi, but one among them worthy to occupy the throne of his ancestors; the rest weak slaves of their favourites, and weaker slaves of their own vices. Hence the power that once extended to the utmost boundaries of Hindostan, and ruled its haughtiest deputies with a rod of iron, is now little more than a shadow. Soubahdars and nabobs no longer wait to be appointed by a mandate from Delhi, but audaciously seize on territories, which they still more audaciously bequeath to their sons, or adopted sons, after them; while, with unparalleled impudence, they impose on the common people by pretended delegates from the imperial city, before whose spurious dignity they bend their stubborn knees, and from whose hands they receive forged credentials with an assumed humility that

deludes and satisfies an ignorant populace. For the last half-century the most dangerous force of the East has been that of the Morattoes—a nation of hardy mountaineers—natives of the hilly regions that extend from the borders of Guzerat to Canara. They are the Swiss of India—ever ready to fight on the stronger side, and able to change leaders with the varying breath of fortune. This is a power which first arose in the palmy days of the Mogul empire, and has fattened upon that empire's decay."

"Then you consider the despotism of Delhi a power of the past?" I asked.

"Yes, Robert. Delhi has seen the last of her greatness. Her splendour sank in an eternal eclipse, when the shepherd monarch of Ispahan, Nadir Shah, and his Persians, invested the city, to retire thence with thirty-two millions' worth of loot, after such a work of ravage as was new even to Hindostan. Shade of Timur, that was indeed a degradation for the chief city of thy Tartar race!"

From Mr. Holwell's conversation I learned the history of the Mogul empire during the last century. It was a bloody record of ambition and treachery, and I, who came fresh from a Christian country, was struck with horror by the crimes of a people whose religion I have heard philosophers extol as little inferior to the faith of Christ. The farther I carried my retrospect, the longer was the list of iniquities which the history of the past revealed; and as a monotonous sameness characterizes the murderous deeds of these Mahometan usurpers, I will not burden this chronicle by going farther back than to the reign of Shah Jehan. This noble follower of the Prophet distinguished himself in early life by the quiet assassination of his elder brother and an unsuccessful rebellion against his father, a feeble-minded monarch, very much under the governance of his wife, and who, after beginning his reign with a little private business in the way of murder on his own account, assumed the modest name of Mahomet Jehangire, or Conqueror of the World. Shah Jehan, knowing the family failing, wisely inaugurated his reign by a happy despatch, per dagger or bowstring, of all the male posterity of Timur, except himself and his four sons. Had he made the exception still narrower, and included the four young Timurs in the general massacre, he would have shown himself a wise man. One of these Tartar cubs was Aurungzebe, who, in early life, acquired the character of a harmless religious enthusiast without a grain of ambition. But when the pious prince engaged in warfare and subjugated two of his brothers, betrayed and imprisoned the third, possessed himself by stratagem of his father's person, and, having safely bestowed that ancient ruler under lock and key, caused himself to be importuned by his nobles, whose entreaties so touched his tender nature—like the prayers of the Duke of Buckingham—that

famous scene of Shakespeare's *Richard III.*—that he submitted to assume the royal power under the title of Aulum Geer, or Conqueror of the Wind.

Aulum Geer, *alias* Aurungzebe, proved himself a wise and prudent despot. He took speedy means to dispose of his best friend and ally, Meer Joomla, whom he despatched on a warlike expedition, which resulted in the destruction of his army by privation and disease, and his own untimely death, whereupon Aurungzebe had the candour to remark that he had lost "the greatest and most dangerous" of his friends.

After languishing in a prison, made tolerable to his senility by the amusements of a well-furnished harem, Shah Jehan expired, and there were not wanting slanderers to whisper that a noxious infusion of poppy-juice, called *poust*, a favourite slow poison of these Orientals, had somewhat accelerated his death. But the subjects of the Mogul empire were too busy for minute inquiries on this point. The emperor was bent on the subjugation alike of Mahometan and Hindoo rulers. He made war upon Morattoes and Sikhs, Rajpoots and Affghans, using sometimes the pretext of religious fervour, sometimes the right of an offended chief, and, having subdued the two sovereigns of the Deccan, and made himself almost master of the Carnatic, he closed a reign of half a century in a harassing and useless struggle with the Morattoes, and died a natural death in his camp, thereby considerably varying the common close of a Mogul sovereignty.

The successors of Aurungzebe are scarce worthy of being chronicled in the same page with so wise and renowned a tyrant. Jehandar Shah, the grandson of this great man, allowed himself to be governed by a public dancer whose very name of Lall Koor sounds disreputable to the English ear. After wasting his days and nights in debauch, and outraging the feelings of his omrahs, or nobles, this Jehandar was deposed and strangled, and his dead body exhibited in the streets of Delhi at the behest of his nephew and successor, Ferokhsere.

Nor did the usurper show himself better worthy to occupy the musnud than the kinsman he displaced. He also inaugurated his accession by the butchery of every man he had reason to fear. He also submitted to the base dominion of favourites, and, as the historian Ferishta remarked of one of his predecessors, "delighted in the soft society of silver-bodied damsels with musky tresses." I should scarcely have recorded his name, save for the fact that to this emperor the East India Company owe the phirmaund which gave them their richest privileges in Hindostan. Mr. Hamilton, a surgeon travelling with an embassy from the English Company, had the good fortune to cure the emperor of a malady which the unskilful treatment of his native physicians had failed to subjugate.

Ferokehshere bade the English doctor name his reward, and the generous Briton solicited privileges for the Company. These privileges included the extension of the Company's territory, the reduction and simplification of the duties hitherto paid by them, the exemption of their goods from stoppage and examination under cover of a passport or dustuck signed by the president of Calcutta, with other protections and exemptions of equal importance. The grant promised by the emperor was only secured after much intrigue and counter-intrigue; but the English embassy was patient, and did not take leave of the Mogul until his royal phirmaund had been obtained.

From the Court of Delhi Mr. Holwell bade me look to the Deccan, or southern provinces of India, where the master-mind of Nizam-al-Mulk had created a sovereignty scarcely second to that of the Moguls, and which his daring had rendered independent of the imperial power. The Nizam had given up the ghost, after more than a century of life in 1747, and since his death the sovereignty of the Deccan had been the subject of unceasing contention. But here I must again indulge in a retrospective glance, even at the risk of appearing prolix, and in order to make my narrative complete, it will be well for me to quote Mr. Holwell's description of the aspect of affairs upon the coast of Coromandel, where Clive was at this time winning his youthful crown of laurels.

"It is just twenty years since Sadatulla, a regular and acknowledged Nabob of the Carnatic, died, much regretted by his subjects, after appointing his nephew and adopted son, Dost Ally, to succeed him. His dying wishes were quietly fulfilled, but not without inspiring secret aversion in the breast of Nizam-al-Mulk, soubahdar of the Deccan, since the accession of Dost Ally to the subordinate kingdom of the Carnatic took place without reference to his authority. It is, however, a peculiarity of the Mahometan mind to smother its resentments, and to patiently await the opportunity of revenge.

"Dost Ally had two sons, the elder of whom, Subder Ally, had attained to man's estate at the time of his father's accession; he had likewise several daughters, one of whom he gave in marriage to his nephew, Mortiz Ally, another to a more distant relation, Chunda Saheb, who became his dewan, or treasurer, one of the most powerful officers of the state.

"This Chunda Saheb was a man of limitless ambition, a supreme master of all the native arts of intrigue. On the death of the Rajah of Trichinopoly, an independent Hindoo state, he was sent with Subder Ally to obtain possession of the city, and by a series of false pretences contrived to seduce the garrison and imprison the dowager queen, who died of grief and humiliation at finding herself thus betrayed. It was even whispered that the unhappy woman had fallen in love with her base

betrayed, and that it was by the softer arts of the lover Chunda Saheb penetrated the citadel.

"Once master of Trichinopoly and its appertaining kingdom, Chunda Saheb showed himself bent on keeping his conquest.

"The Nabob, who cherished a high opinion of his son-in-law's genius, dared not recall him from his new power. Chunda Saheb, without openly throwing off his allegiance to such an indulgent master, took care to improve the defences of Trichinopoly, and to plant his two brothers in the strongest towns of his little kingdom.

"Nizam-al-Mulk's hatred of Dost Ally and his race was only increased by the extension of their possessions, but as he was obliged to keep his arms turned towards Delhi, where he was equally dreaded and detested, he was unable to assail this aspiring family in person. In this dilemma he had recourse to the Morattoes, and gave those savage mountaineers permission to attack the Carnatic; thus by the same stroke wiping out his obligations to that race and gratifying his own resentments. This permission of the soubahdar's was like the loosening of some mighty mountain stream, that carries sudden devastation to the valleys below its source. A hundred thousand Morattoes under Ragojee Bonsala swept across the western barrier of the Carnatic before Dost Ally was able to collect his forces to oppose them. Bloody was the struggle that followed. The treachery of an Indian officer gave the Nabob and his army into the hands of the foe. Dost Ally and his younger son, Hassan, fell dead from their elephants on the field of battle, and with the common result of a leader's death amongst Oriental armies, immediate rout and ruin followed their fall.

"Subder Ally had happily taken refuge in the stronghold of Vellore, and from that citadel he made terms with the triumphant Morattoes. He then assumed the title and authority of Nabob, and Chunda Saheb came to Arcot to do homage to him, with a splendour of retinue and military force that made him appear the equal rather than the dependant of Subder Ally. In the December of the same year, however, the Morattoes returned, in consequence of a secret engagement with Subder Ally, invested Trichinopoly, intercepted and slaughtered the two brothers of Chunda Saheb—the severed head of one of whom they sent him as a confirmation of his brothers' defeat—and after a siege of three months, finally subjugated the city, and captured its resolute defender, Chunda Saheb, whom they carried off to a strong fort near their metropolis of Sattarah.

"That ambitious spirit, Chunda Saheb, being thus safely bestowed at a remote distance from the Carnatic, and the Morattoes appeased by the conquest of Trichinopoly, Subder Ally might have enjoyed his kingdom in tolerable security but for his fear ever-present of the Nizam, whose wrath could only

be appeased by the payment of those large arrears of revenue which the late Nabob, Dost Ally, had withheld. But to part with his treasures was a sacrifice which Subder Ally could not bring himself to make, and he strove to soften his creditor by humble excuses and pretended poverty, even giving out that he intended to go to Arabia, and end his days in acts of piety at the tomb of his Prophet.

"His poverty and devotion were alike assumed, but the late calamities had made such an impression upon his mind that he left the defenceless city of Arcot, and took up his residence in the fortified citadel of Vellore, the strongest in the Carnatic, while his family and treasures were placed under the care of the English at Madras; for it is a notorious testimony to British honesty that these heathens will often trust us when they dare not trust each other.

"Unhappily for this cautious sovereign, danger lurked within the citadel of Vellore, more dire, because more secret, than the perils of unfortified Arcot. Mortiz Ally was the Nabob's brother-in-law, bound to him by every tie of gratitude and affection; but amongst these people such ties count for nothing when once interest is at stake. The Nabob knew that inherited wealth and parsimonious habits had made Mortiz Ally the richest man in his dominions, and was determined that he should contribute to the satisfaction of the greedy Morattoes in common with the other governors of the province. None of these gentlemen were too well inclined to disburse their treasures, and needed but the example of a respectable leader to refuse obedience to the Nabob's demand. They, therefore, took occasion to hint to Mortiz Ally that Nizam-al-Mulk, the Soubahdar of the Southern Provinces, would be inclined to favour rebellion against a prince who had defied his vice-royalty.

"In the East, rebellion generally means assassination. Mortiz Ally was at once avaricious, ambitious, revengeful, and cowardly. He never moved, even in his own palace, without the protection of his guards, and never tasted food or drink until his wife had affixed her seal upon the vessel that contained it. For such a character the Nabob entertained the most profound contempt, and at last, wearied by Mortiz Ally's repeated excuses for withholding the payment of his arrears of the assessment, went so far as to threaten him with displacement from his government if he persisted any longer in such trifling.

"This imprudent threat was the spark that fired the train. The discontented governors flattered Mortiz Ally's ambition, promising to acknowledge him chief of the Carnatic, in the place of his brother-in-law. The traitor now only waited his opportunity to strike.

"This seemed difficult to seize. Subder Ally's army lay within the suburbs and under the walls of Vellore. A numerous guard

attended him within the fort. Mortiz Ally was too great a dastard to dream of open violence, and only showed himself more than usually servile after the insult he had received from his brother-in-law. The assassin might, indeed, have waited long for his opportunity had it not been afforded by the singular imprudence of the Nabob himself.

"At the chief religious festival of Mahometan India, Subder Ally's servants asked permission to absent themselves for two or three days, in order to celebrate their pious orgies in their own families. The unsuspecting Nabob, contrary to all courtly etiquette, suffered all his retinue and guards, except four persons, to leave him, and even desired that some of Mortiz Ally's officers and servants might attend him, in the absence of his own.

"The governor of Vellore was prompt to seize so excellent an occasion. Poison was at first attempted, and failed. But even this attempt did not awaken Subder Ally to the consciousness of his peril. He gave a ready ear to his enemy's servants, who attributed his illness to one of the bilious disorders so common in India. On this followed a night of horror, during which the gates of Vellore were shut against all intruders. Among all his subjects, Mortiz Ally found but one man willing to execute his orders. This was an officer whose wife the Nabob had dishonoured. The assassin entered Subder Ally's apartment at midnight, at the head of a band of Abyssinian slaves, upbraided him with his wrongs, and stabbed him to death as he was in the act of escaping by a window.

"Mortiz Ally endeavoured to appease the Nabob's army by a somewhat lame account of their master's death; but the general opinion of his character was such that the soldiery flew to arms, declaring that their sovereign had been murdered by the Governor of Vellore. The attachment of these devoted creatures, however, had its price; and on Mortiz Ally bidding high for their affection, they consented to waive their desire for vengeance, and agreed to accept him as Nabob of the Carnatic some forty-eight hours after the murder of Subder Ally Khan.

"The new Nabob made a triumphal entry into the chief city of Arcot, and for some time all went merry as a marriage-bell, until several of the principal officers of the Carnatic discovered that they sympathized in a profound detestation of their new master; while the army, finding that Mortiz Ally's liberal promises had not resulted in ready-money, surrounded his palace, and tumultuously demanded their due.

"This was enough for the timorous Nabob, who immediately fled from Arcot to his stronghold of Vellore, disguised in a woman's dress and shrouded by the curtains of a palanquin, only to reappear when the time was again ripe for treachery and murder. Upon this, Seid Mahomet Khan, the youthful son of the murdered Subder Ally, was immediately proclaimed

Nabob, and removed under the guardianship of his mother from Madras to Wandewash, a fortress in the command of his uncle by marriage. The sagacious and powerful old soubahdar, Nizam-al-Mulk, having for the moment no danger to fear from Delhi, now appeared upon the scene, supported by an army of eighty thousand horse and two hundred thousand foot. He was at once indignant and surprised by the state of anarchy which prevailed in the Carnatic, where every governor of a fort and every commander of a district had assumed the title and state of Nabob. "Scourge me the next son of a dog who dares approach my presence under the name of Nabob!" cried the proud old Viceroy; "for I have this day seen no less than eighteen Nabobs in the Carnatic, whereas I imagined there was but one in the Southern Provinces."

"The son of Subder Ally was among the visitors who did obeisance to the Soubahdar. Nizam-al-Mulk did not permit this young prince to return to the safe-keeping of his uncle at Wandewash, but gave him into the charge of his own officers, who were bidden to show the lad all possible respect. The Composer-of-the-State then returned to Golcondah, and gave the sovereignty of the Carnatic to one of his generals, who had the misfortune to be found dead in his bed on the morning appointed for his departure to his new kingdom, not without suspicion of poison.

"This somewhat suspicious decease resulted in the appointment of An'war-adean Khan, whose enemies were not slow to hint that he who most profited by the death of his predecessor was the person whose unknown hand had hastened that event. An'war-adean was the son of a learned Mahometan, deeply versed in the original text of the Koran, and one of the religious officers attached to the person of the late mighty Aurngzebe. The new Nabob was a brave and prudent officer; but the people of the Carnatic cherished a warm affection for the race of Dost Ally, whose descendants had governed them with a gentle hand, and Nizam-al-Mulk found it prudent to assert that An'war-adean was appointed only as a regent until such time as Seid Mahomet, the son of Subder Ally, should be old enough to reign. In the meantime the boy was placed under An'war-adean's guardianship, in a position that somewhat resembled that of a famous young prince of the House of York under the tender care of his kind uncle Gloster.

"An'war-adean treated his charge with all show of kindness, despite any natural jealousy which may have been aroused in his mind by the general joy with which the populace had welcomed the youth on his return to Arcot. Installed in the palace of the fort, Seid Mahomet had no possible cause for uneasiness, save the somewhat clamorous demands of the Patans a body of Mahometan soldiers from the extreme north of Hin-



dostan, whose hardihood, courage, and audacity distinguished them from all other inhabitants of the empire. These men had served Subder Ally, and they now tormented his son by daily demands for their arrears.

"In the month of June, the young prince, as head of his family, was called upon to preside at the marriage festival of a kinsman, which was to be celebrated with all pomp in the fort of Arcot. Invitations were sent far and wide to the bridegroom's kindred, many of whom were governors of cities in the Carnatic.

"Amongst these was Mortiz Ally. The prince was bidden to conceal his natural aversion, and to receive the murderer of his father with all Oriental courtesy. It was thought by many that the cowardly Governor of Vellore would not trust himself outside the gates of his stronghold upon an invitation from the son of his victim; but to the general surprise he presented himself among the guests of the young prince, and was treated with distinguished respect by the regent, An'war-adean Khan.

"The marriage festival was not suffered to proceed without interruption from the insolence of the Patan soldiers, twelve of whom, with their captain at their head, broke through the ceremonial pomp of the prince's court, to urge their demands with even more than common insolence. They were repelled by Seid Mahomet's servants, at first with contumely, and in the end with violence; such an outrage as is rarely offered to this proud and insolent people without provoking a sanguinary and immediate revenge.

The thirteen Patans, however, received this rebuff with unusual meekness and on the same day tendered their humble apologies for the morning's violence. Their submission was readily accepted, and all was calm; yet it was but a deceitful tranquillity, which presaged the coming tempest.

"With evening came the most brilliant hour of the festival. Seid Mahomet, with Mortiz Ally, and most of the other guests, were assembled, when the approach of the Regent Nabob was announced. The young prince, desiring to pay his venerable guardian public homage, passed into the vestibule, intending to receive him at the bottom of a flight of steps leading to the court of the palace. The thirteen Patans were among the spectators in this lower court, and as the prince appeared, surrounded by his guests, and attended by his officers and guards, these haughty warriors greeted him with demonstrative reverence and affection. After these compliments, their captain rapidly ascended the steps, as if about to cast himself at the feet of his offended lord, and having thrown Seid Mahomet's attendants off their guard by his contrition of countenance and manner, suddenly drew his dagger, and with one blow pierced the young prince's heart.

"In an instant the vestibule flashed with naked swords. The

assassin was cut to pieces on the spot, and ten of his companions were sacrificed by the furious crowd below. Amidst this scene of horror An'war-adean Khan appeared, and promptly gave such orders as were necessary for the discovery of the conspirators; since it was the general cry that the Patans had only been the venal instruments of some hidden power.

"Nor was it long before a vengeful murmur arose, coupled with the name of Mortiz Ally. The Governor of Vellore had been beside the prince as he fell, but when he was now sought for, it was discovered that he had availed himself of the general confusion to fly from Arcot, attended by a large body of cavalry and other troops, which had been awaiting him in a spirit of caution that argued a foregone conclusion. Pursuit would have been worse than useless, for no equal force of cavalry was ready on the instant, and the distance from Arcot to Vellore was but twelve miles. Curses and imprecations on the murderer's head rang out upon the air which had so lately echoed the tinkling of lutes, and brazen clash of cymbals, and all the joyous sounds of eastern festival. The populace, dispersed by an order from An'war-adean Khan, retired to their homes in gloomy silence, or gathered stealthily in secret companies to communicate their dark suspicions. The Nabob not only dismissed every Patan in his service, but ordered that no member of that nation should remain an hour longer in the city, and that their houses should be razed to the ground—the last mark of infamy which Oriental justice can inflict upon a malefactor. Yet, so given to suspicion is the public mind, even this conduct did not hinder the assertion that the murder of Seid Mahomet had been plotted by An'war-adean and Mortiz Ally.

"Such whispers having reached the ear of the Nabob, he strongly denied all share in a crime he boldly attributed to the Governor of Vellore, and challenged his detractors to the proof of their foul slanders. Mortiz Ally, for his part, as boldly accused the Nabob, but brought forward no proof to sustain his assertion; and it was supposed that the same evidence which would have condemned An'war-adean must also have demonstrated his own guilt.

"Favoured by Nizam-al-Mulk, and sheltered by his vice-royal power, An'war-adean held his ground as Nabob of the Carnatic; but his government was not the less hateful to his people. The death of the Nizam, in 1748, was the signal for revolution. And now the spirit of European intrigue allied itself to the plotting genius of the East. Dupleix, the governor of the French establishment of Pondicherry, had long since secretly fixed on Chunda Saheb, as a member of Dost Ally's race most gifted with the talents of intrigue. Now followed plot upon the heels of plot, revolution upon revolution. Nazir Jung,

the son of the late Nizam, and Moozuffer Jung, his grand-nephew, contested the government of the Deccan. Chunda Saheb, ransomed from the Morattoes by French gold, moulded Moozuffer Jung to his own ends, and struggled for dominion in the Carnatic; while Dupleix, like the monkey in the fable, waited till his catspaw should have snatched the prize, to grasp it for himself; and, if not actually aspiring to Oriental sovereignty upon his own account, was at any rate bent upon elevating to power a Soubahdar of the Decan, and a Nabob of the Carnatic, who should be little more than the instruments of his will. To what height this aspiring man might have reached, and what extended dominion France might have acquired in the East, had not the English at last awakened from their ignominious apathy, I can hardly venture to calculate.

"For some time the rebels were triumphant. An'-war-adean was slain in an engagement, at the age of one hundred and seven years. His eldest son was taken prisoner during the same struggle; and his second son, Mahomet Ally, with the remnant of the army, escaped to his government of Trichinopoly. Success favoured the arms and intrigues of Dupleix and his two allies. The powerful hill-fortress of Gingee, hitherto deemed impregnable, was taken by the French under Bussy; Nazir Jung was slain under circumstances of some treachery; his nephew and opponent, Moozuffer Jung, installed as Soubahdar of the Deccan; and the ambitious Dupleix made Governor of all the countries south of the Kistna with Chunda Saheb for his deputy at Arcot.

"Moozuffer Jung was not permitted long to enjoy his triumph. He perished in an attempt to subdue the ever-rebellious Patans, who, having helped to raise him to the throne, were insatiable in their demands for reward. At this perilous juncture, the French interest was protected by Bussy, who instantly proclaimed Salabut Jung, eldest surviving son of the Nizam, Soubahdar of the Deccan. This prince confirmed all the grants made to Dupleix, and it may be fairly said, that at this period the governor of Pondicherry wielded a power superior to that of the Great Mogul himself.

"While a plotting French politician and his general had thus contrived to seize the dominion of Southern India, the prospects of the English Company were of the darkest hue. Mahomet Ally, the one chief friendly to the British Government, was reduced to the single possession of Trichinopoly; and nothing appeared more likely than that the whole Carnatic would fall into the power of Chunda Saheb, from whom we English could expect neither favour nor mercy. Against the audacious intrigues of Dupleix, and the military skill of his generals, we could only oppose the prudence of a petty trade committee; since Colonel Lawrence was at this most critical epoch absent

in England on private affairs. Menaced with certain ruin in the event of Chunda Saheb's extending power, and insulted by the French, who planted their white flags upon almost every field around the English boundary, and even within the English limits, it was time that forbearance and neutrality should cease.

"In this dark hour, when British pride had been humbled to the very dust by the rapid successes and undisguised insolence of a rival power, there arose upon the clouded horizon a star which, as I think, is destined to mount yet higher in the military heaven. While Colonel Lawrence was still in Europe, and in the absence of orders from England, Robert Clive, with an innate military genius, took the helm of affairs, and Arcot, the chief city of the Carnatic, was seized by a handful of English soldiers, held against a siege of fifty days' duration, and secured to the English ally. This was but the beginning of triumphs. Other engagements as brilliant have followed in rapid succession, and thus Robert Clive, at the age of twenty-six, has undermined the French power in the Carnatic, humbled the pride of that most ambitious nation, and founded the renown of British arms in India."

Thus ran my patron's record of affairs past and present upon the coast of Coromandel. It was during my own residence in India that the young captain, whose name had already become synonymous with victory, enjoyed a signal triumph at Trichinopoly; but before this new conquest, the daring chief, Chunda Saheb, had terminated his adventurous and troubled career under circumstances of peculiar cruelty.

His affairs having become desperate, he accepted a deceitful promise of protection from Monackjee, the general of the Tanjore force. It is possible that Monackjee gave this pledge in good faith, but finding all other powers bent on disputing his possession of so illustrious a prisoner, this barbarous Tanjorine put his too-confiding captive to death, and despatched the head of Chunda Saheb as a bloody offering to his rival and enemy, Mahomet Ally.

Such was the state of affairs upon the southern coast when I entered upon my new duties as Mr. Holwell's secretary. In Bengal all was quiet. The Nabob Allaverdy Khan, in his actions in the present, showed himself a beneficent ruler and an amiable man; but when I ventured to say as much to my patron, Mr. Holwell regarded me with a somewhat ironical smile. "Yes, Bob," he replied, "the Nabob is a very indulgent ruler, and no doubt altogether an excellent person; but for all that I should scarcely care to trust too much to his honour. I tell you, boy, these Mahometans are false to the marrow of their bones, and treachery is as natural to them as truth and honesty are supposed to be to John Bull; though I have found, by the way, that even that blustering gentleman can tell a lie when his interest pushes him to it."

"Will you tell me why you think badly of Allaverdy, sir?" I

asked, ever curious about the rulers of this strange empire, which seemed to me wonderful as a glimpse of fairyland, and ancient as a page of Herodotus.

"You shall hear the darkest passage of his life, Robert, and form your own judgment upon it. He and his brother, Hodgee Hamed, began their careers as penniless adventurers, the sons of a wily Tartar, and rose to power by the favour of Sujah Khan, Nabob of Bengal, Behar, and Orixá, who made the elder brother, Hodgee Hamed, his Prime Minister, and the younger, Allaverdy, general of his troops, and ultimately governor of Behar. Each well suited his allotted post, the elder being versed in the arts of suppression and diplomacy, while the younger had all the best gifts of a military leader. The two were closely bound to each other, for self-interest, in this case, strengthened the ties of relationship.

"The short-lived gratitude of the East did not long secure to Sujah Khan the fidelity of these favoured subjects. A conspiracy was ripening for the casting aside of all authority on the part of the Deputy-governor of Behar, and Sujah, apprised of this treachery, was meditating vengeance, when Nadir Shah, the Persian Alexander, and his forces, swept like the whirlwind across Hindostan, and every eye was turned to Delhi. Before the Persian had left the imperial city, Sujah died, and his profligate son, Suffraze Khan, succeeded to his sovereignty.

"The vices of this new ruler were eminently favourable to the ambitious plans of the two brothers. Suffraze quickly contrived to offend all his influential subjects, amongst others Juggat Seit, the head of the princely banking-house of Muxadavad, whose son's wife he insulted by an act of supreme folly. Hodgee promptly traded upon his master's errors. A plot was hatched, and Allaverdy invaded Bengal. The reigning Nabob was slain, after a nobler resistance than might have been expected from so vicious a man, and Allaverdy pushed boldly onward to Muxadavad, where he was proclaimed Nabob of Bengal, Behar, and Orixá.

"The power thus audaciously seized was not long unassailed. The proud and wily Composer-of-the-State, Nizam-al-Mulk, took alarm, and incited the Morattoes to attack the new Nabob. Eighty thousand of these hardy warriors swooped from their mountain strongholds upon Allaverdy's new dominions; and long and desperate were the struggles that inaugurated the Nabob's reign. The Morattoes ravaged the country, collected the revenues of almost the whole of the territory south of the Ganges, and after being beaten, routed, and driven out of Allaverdy's dominion one year, reappeared the next, with renewed strength and unconquerable audacity; nor could handsome payments on the part of their victim assure him of exemption from attack.

"In Eastern politics, when affairs grow desperate, treachery

is not so far distant. Finding himself powerless to cope with so strong and slippery a foe, Allaverdy pretended a desire to treat, and proposed a personal conference with Baschir Pondit, the general, and moving spirit of the Morattoo army. Doubting the good faith of the Nabob's professions, Baschir Pondit refused his consent to this interview until Allaverdy had sworn on the Koran that no treachery should be attempted. It was agreed that the two leaders should meet in a tent pitched on the open plain, each attended by an equal number of officers and unarmed servants. But the care of providing the tent was left to Allaverdy, who had contrived to hoodwink the Morattoo general by offering to send his wife to visit the wife of Baschir Pondit, a social concession of supreme importance in this land of ceremonies.

"At the appointed hour the two chiefs advanced to the tent, each attended by the most distinguished of his officers, while in the distance a long train of covered palanquins, supposed to contain Allaverdy's wife and her retinue, was seen moving towards the Morattoo camp. What passed within the tent has been told by many, and seldom told alike. Enough is known to stamp the work of that hour as one of the darkest deeds ever committed on this wicked earth. At a signal, fifty armed men sprang from the sides of the tent, which had been constructed with a double lining to afford ambush for the assassins. The Morattoo general and his captains were massacred to a man; but Allaverdy did not draw his sword. He only looked on and approved the carnage. When the work of slaughter was finished, a signal of attack was thrown out, and the Bengal army rushed at once upon their disorganized foe. The Morattoes fled in confusion, only to re-assemble and renew the war with redoubled fury.

"Ten years of harassing warfare followed that day of treason; and a treaty of peace, arranged between the Nabob and his hydra-headed foe, is not yet ratified. But the Morattoes have been propitiated by subsidies and concessions, and Allaverdy, now a very old man, has received his patent from the sorely enfeebled powers of Delhi, on condition that he shall annually remit the tribute of six millions of rupees. The courage and fortitude he has displayed in overcoming innumerable difficulties have endeared him to his people, despite the murder of Baschir Pondit, and a few minor treacheries, which his subjects indulgently ascribe to the account of Hodgee Hamed, who fell a victim to the anger of his enemies, and expired, universally execrated, some years ago. To his own people he has been a just and not unkind master; with the English Company he has on the whole dealt fairly, although he has shown himself somewhat exacting in money matters. But, take him for all in all, I fear we are likely to have reason to regret his loss."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Because his nephew, and probable successor, Mirza Mahmud, is a cruel voluptuary, who hates the English, and, indeed, loves nothing but his own sensual pleasures. He has enjoyed a princely education, which, in the Oriental sense of the word, means the slavish flattery of parasites, and the unrestrained indulgence of every vicious propensity. The favourite amusement of his childhood was the torture of birds and animals; the diversions of his manhood consist in the society of profligate menials and low buffoons, and in the gratification of a propensity for intoxicating liquors, to say nothing of other vices, which serve to mark the contrast between himself and his great-uncle, ever a temperate man, and the faithful husband of one wife."

"And is this wretch certain to become Nabob?"

"I believe there is little doubt of it, though the appointment has not yet been formally made. The people of Bengal look forward with terror to such a ruler; but Mirza Mahmud has contrived to hide his real nature from his great-uncle, who has regarded the young man from his birth with an almost dotting fondness; and amongst this servile people no one dares enlighten the old man as to his adopted son's disposition and pursuits. All we English can do is to pray that Allaverdy's years may be prolonged to the utmost limit."

#### NOTE C.

THE close of Shawamut Jung's life had been darkened by a tragedy of which his nephew, Suraja Doulah, had been the hidden cause. He was Governor of Dacca—a province which could easily become the centre of a revolution—and possessed treasures and influence which might have made him a formidable opponent in any struggle for power. Suraja Doulah dreaded this; but his treachery assailed, not his uncle, but his uncle's prime counsellor and intellectual superior, Hassein Coolly Khan. Hassein's nephew was at this time Deputy-governor of Dacca. Him Suraja Doulah caused to be despatched by assassins, who entered the city disguised in the dead of the night; and before the public mind had recovered the shock of this event, Hassein himself was murdered in the streets of Maxadavad in open day.

Gloomy were the anticipations formed of the youthful director of these crimes, who, of course, denied all participation in the bloody work. While Allaverdy yet lingered, death swept both his nephews, the two uncles of Suraja Doulah, from the stage of politics. Both died of fever, without suspicion of poison, though it must be owned their removal happened auspiciously for the Lamp of Riches.







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